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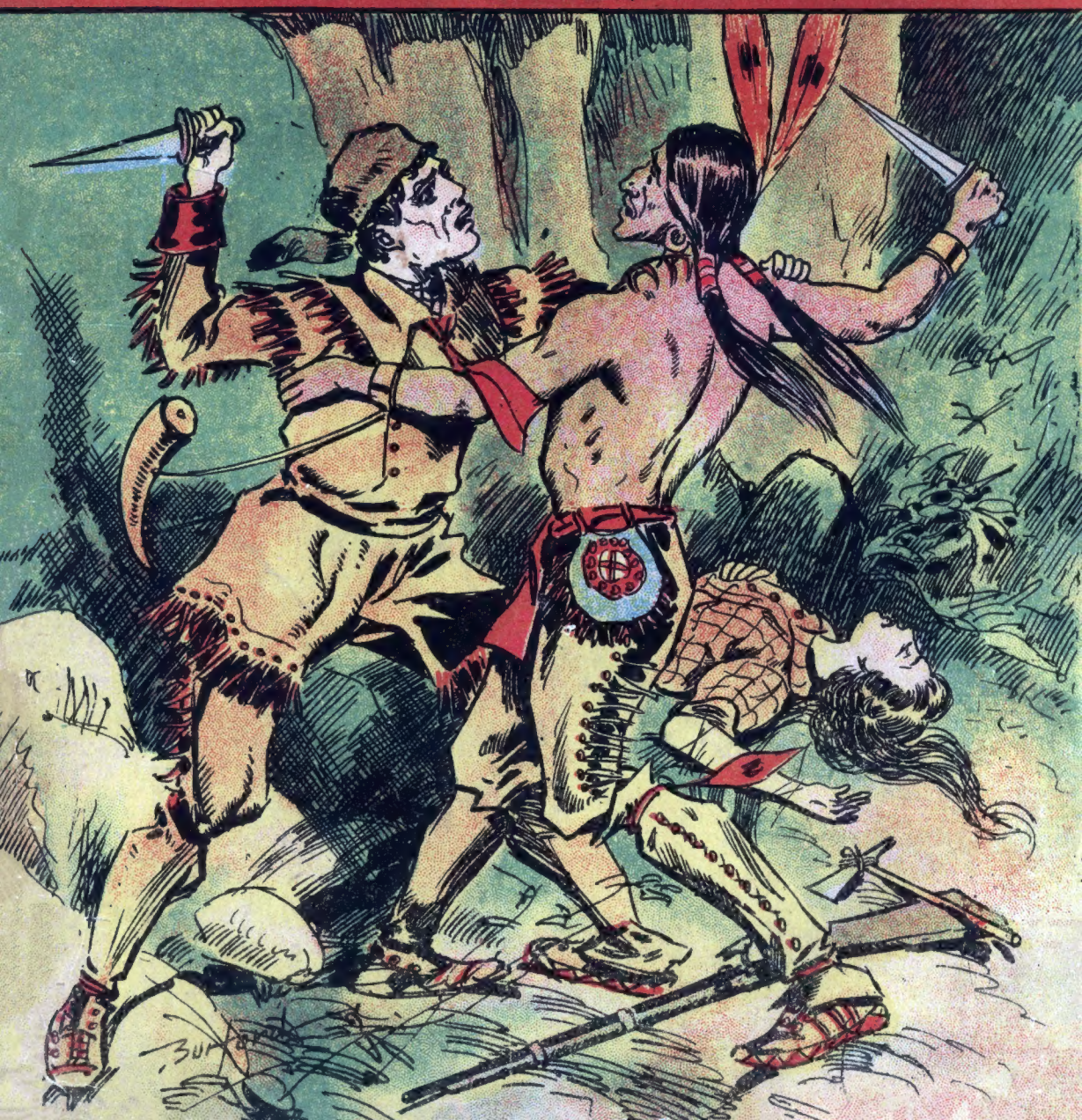
The SHAWNEE WITCH

A ROMANCE OF THE WESTERN BORDER

BY JOHN W. MACKEY.



THE SHAWNEE WITCH.

A ROMANCE OF THE WESTERN BORDER.

BY

JOHN W. MACKEY.

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The Shawnee Witch.

CHAPTER I.

STARTLING NEWS—THE MASSACRE—THE STOLEN CHILD—HOWARD'S DESPAIR—THE OATH ON THE FIELD OF MASSACRE.

TIME—The dawn of an August morning, years and years ago.

Place—A forest glade in the far-western wilds.

The balmy breeze of the Summer morn sighs and rustles through the thick-grown trees, monarchs of the forest these many years. It made the shallow waters of the forest brooks wave and ripple in the morning breeze. The songsters of the grove warbled and chirped in merry glee, gladdened by the bright sunshine and the prospect of glorious day.

The rich green grass was sparkling and damp with diamond dewdrops; the wild forest roses and flowers of the woods all full and fresh; the green trees, the cool and shaded stream through whose transparent waters the finny dwellers were seen to frolic and sport in the fairness of their home.

Yet the time had been when this greensward had been

dyed with blood of mortal men; when these grand old trees had echoed again and again the shrieks and dying groans and curses of the white man and the red; when the bright sun arose in peace and harmony, and ere the night had sunk, on a scene of bloodshed and murder.

The times of which I write were dark and troubled ones.

My tale takes its date from the dread days of the Western border—those dark, dark days, when the Indian of the western world held sway over the entire breadth of frontier; when the crimson destroying cloud of butchery and massacre hung in a black and gloomy pall over the venturesome white man and his Western home.

Since the events here related transpired, many years have rolled on; but time, instead of lessening, increases the interest which hangs about every incident connected with our nation's early history.

In these troubled times the sturdy pioneers were driven and scattered like chaff before a whirlwind. Settlers and their families went to their beds at night in dread and doubt that it would be their last on earth. Savage bands and various tribes roamed and scoured the country from dawn till midnight on their errands of death.

It was, as a poet has described it, a "Crimson carnival of blood."

Homes were desolated hearts were broken, and the fate of the whites looked gloomy indeed.

Promising settlements, the pride and toil of many a day, were, in the dead of night, surprised, surrounded and fired, and the inhabitants—heaven help them!—given over to torture, death and captivity. Flat-boats crowded by emigrants, poor souls! looking and seeking a home in the very hotbed of murder and trial and privation.

They were often (alas! too often) decoyed from their onward course by decoys on the narrow shores, who, in different ways, and by many deceitful means, betrayed and proved the ruin and death of many an unwary and unsuspecting boat of emigrants.

The entire bands of Indians were on the path of war —war against the white man and his entire race.

They sought to drive them from their grounds, which the great spirit, they said, had given to them.

The settlers cried for peace; but their answer was "Blood." The old matron, the innocent babe, and young and old—all were sacrificed, with no distinction to age or sex.

But the greater fiends, the most-dreaded savages, were the white renegades.

Outcasts from their people, traitors to their race and homes, they were far more bloodthirsty and more to be dreaded than even the Indian—if that were possible.

But among the most terrible and villainous that ever cursed the Western border by his presence, was Dick Dalton, the renegade.

Bad from his birth; wicked, cruel and dishonest, he had broken his mother's heart, and made her daily life a dread and burden to her.

At length, he ran away from his city home, and went to the West, and one night, footsore and sick, he had applied for aid at the little settlement of Sunnyside.

He was warmly welcomed and kindly treated. But one night, four years after, he suddenly disappeared, no one knew where, until a few days after, when a scout returning from his hunt, informed the settlers that Dick Dalton had been seen by himself in an Indian village; and it was then known that the man whom they had befriended had turned his back upon his people and became a renegade.

When this news reached his unhappy mother in the distant city, it proved her death-blow, and soon after she breathed her last.

On the Western border his name sent a thrill of fear through every white man's heart. Women shuddered, and little children, at the sound of Dalton's name, crept closer to their mother's side with awe and apprehension.

I have now given the reader, I hope, a clear view of

the times and trials of the date of which I write. I now begin my tale.

On this same August morning which began my story, a man of some thirty years stood by a stately tree, on the top and near the verge of a towering cliff.

His dress, neat and clean, consisted of the usual garb of a backwoods settler—a costume too often described to be again related here.

A dark, good-natured face it was, brown, and beaming with good health and spirits. Tall, graceful, with clustering curls of jet hair falling over a high and intelligent forehead, clear, sparkling eyes, and this, reader, was Paul Howard, a leading character in our tragic drama.

He stood on the Squaw's Cliff, one hand on the trunk of the tree that overhung it, and the other hand was on his rifle, which glistened in the light of the rising sun like a bar of silver.

He looked on a peaceful, happy sight—the home of his wife and child.

At the bottom of the valley below nestled the secluded settlement of Sunnyside—a miniature town of some twenty cabins or so, a calm and pretty sight on this August morn.

Built in the very centre of the valley, and bordered on one side by the Squaw's Cliff, on the other by a dense forest, a narrow, winding stream, and away off in the shadowy distance wilds of prairie met the view.

Wide and flowing fields of ripe corn and grain waving and tossing their heads on the breeze of the morning; pastures of fresh grass, where well-fed cows and various domestic animals eat and made the most of their comfortable quarters. The cabins were small, and built in the usual fashion of those days, rude, and roughly constructed, but considered a haven of luxury in those times.

From the top of the cliff Paul Howard caught a bird's-eye view of his valley home. The light-blue vapor was rising from nearly every cabin in the place, fires were building, and the settlement of Sunnyside was awakening for another day.

"How beautiful!" murmured Paul, as his eyes drank in the beauties of the scene; "how peaceful and happy everything looks! The cabin where my life-treasures dwell I see, and hear the distant hum of voices; and all seems so calm. Oh, heaven! watch over and guard my loving wife and child, my little, blue-eyed Kate, and all yon poor settlers and their homes. I never leave yon valley for a few days' hunting but I feel a sick dread of their danger, and now, this bright morning, there's a heavy, leaden weight at my heart that I can't account for. And what do I dread—the beasts of the forest? No; but those deadlier beasts, those human foes to the white race, those vampyres of the West, the Indians, are at their massacres again, and heaven help the settlement that they get notice of! Sunnyside, thank fortune, is entirely unknown, and of its existence the red savages are ignorant.

"Well, it won't do to loiter here, so I must leave. It's a capital day for the early game, and I must bring a well-filled bag home, for my dear wife always expects it, and there's little Kate, how she cries for joy at the game and birds I bring home. Oh, I shall be fortunate to-day, I know I shall. Well, here's to hunting and the woods!"

He lightly kissed his hand at the awakening settlement, and turned into the forest just behind him.

It is not necessary to follow Paul through his expedition of that day, with the exception of saying that he had never before been more successful. Game was in plenty, birds and minor animals were in abundance, and before the hour of one o'clock of that day, his game-bag was overflowing with rich and fresh forest game, the pride and glory of a border hunter.

"And now I will return," said Paul as he securely tied the leather strings of his bag; "Oh! I shall surprise them; they little expect me so soon, and then for a good supper."

Alas he was utterly blind to the future, and saw not the shadow of death and misfortune, that was doomed to darken the coming years of his life.

All the morning strange feelings had entered his breast, and on his journey towards home, they grew more and more painful as if in warning of impending doom.

The afternoon sun was at its height, as Paul Howard pursued his way through the forest, and the day grew very warm and sultry.

About this time a strange noise reached his ear, or perhaps it was his imagination—but to him it seemed the far distant tramp of numerous feet, then the far off gallop of a horse.

Who and what could it be? perhaps a tribe of wandering savages. He stood in a deep glade in the forest; around on every side great clumps of thick and tangled bushes grew. He stopped and pushed some aside, and forcing his way in he was entirely concealed from view.

Then he lay and watched and waited.

When he had concealed himself, the noise of tramping feet had ceased.

But the galloping horse was dashing nearer every second. At that instant Paul stepped from where he had hidden and looked in the direction from whence the horse seemed to be rushing. Then about a quarter of a mile further off, a horse and rider was galloping in the direction of where Paul stood, who, straining his eyes, was watching anxiously the horse and its rider.

A few minutes after, a foam-covered, panting horse, sweating, and snorting came rushing up the forest glade and stopped a few paces from where the hunter stood, whose heart grew sick as he saw who it was.

Its rider was a mere child, a boy of twelve years or so, hatless, and with wild look upon his boyish face, where terror and fear, were plainly marked.

Panting for breath he reined in his steed, and looked at Paul Howard, who quickly asked:

"What, in Heaven's name ails you, Harry; has anything happened at the settlement? speak, boy."

"The Indians, the Indians they have been there—Oh! Mr. Howard, how can I tell you how——"

"Great God, Harry, my boy, what do you mean?" cried the hunter in an agonized voice, as the shadow of the awful truth burst upon his brain; "explain where are you going."

"To Danbury, two miles below, to get help and weapons," answered the boy preparing to start.

"Stop and tell me the cause of this; is the settlement about to be attacked?"

"Oh! Mr. Howard, it is burning now; they, the Indians surprised us at noon; we were unprepared.

I saw mother killed, and little Fred and father, and oh! so many; but I shot three redskins and dashed to get help, and now I am off.

"My wife, my child—did—did you see them?"

"Your wife and little Kate got into the block-house and all in there were safe when I left."

"Then go as fast as the very wind itself to Danbury; tell them we are attacked, tell them to send us help without a second's delay, and God speed you on your errand, my poor boy."

With the speed of lightning, the brave boy and his steed dashed through the wood and soon was lost to view. Paul Howard followed the boy's example, and while little Harry plunged through woods, over rocks and on to the town of Danbury, he ran with redoubled speed in the direction of his threatened home.

After a quarter of an hour's run, he came in sight of a rocky crag that overlooked the valley. It was some twenty feet or so from the bottom of the valley to the top of the crag, very rough and steep it was, and on its height a tall and steel-like forest tree grew, overhanging the vale.

He reached the crag and looked with whirling brain and bursting heart on the scene below.

The entire settlement was enveloped in flames.

The ground was literally strewn with the dead and dying. Whites and Indians lay in a commingled mass on the blood-stained grass, the rude fences were torn down

and thrown on the consuming cabins; women and children, old men and young men lay in the stillness of death, while the devouring flames crackled as if in glee.

The Indians had finished their fiendish deed, and away in the distance poor stricken Paul saw a long canoe crowded with Indians, pull off into the stream.

Another canoe lay in the water near the shore, tied to a thick clump of reeds.

Then his wild eyes wandered in the direction of the block-house; it was as yet untouched, but through the stillness of the afternoon came a long series of screams from a woman.

Just at that instant, an Indian and a white man dragging a woman between them, came from out the rude fort. The woman frantically hugged her child to her breast, and cried out to spare it.

"Heavens—'tis my wife, my poor Nellie and our little baby, Kate; oh, fiends incarnate! they intend to murder them," madly shrieked the near distracted hunter.

The white renegade Dalton—for he it was—snatched the screaming babe from its mother's arms, and dashed up the path into the canoe, and away like a bird with the child.

The mother's cry rang through the valley, and the sound of his imperiled wife's voice, seemed to rise Paul from the fixed stare and stupor that this awful scene had left him in.

The Indian alone was left with the poor woman, who rushed towards the distant shore. Great Heavens! the savage pursues her—he nears her—and on the very verge of the banks of the river he grasps her by the raven tresses, and she falls to the earth.

The monster draws his knife and tomahawk, to finish a murderous deed.

The maddened hunter came to himself at last. The tree that overhung the crag proved a friend in this terrible hour. He grasped its thin, but strong and elastic trunk, and cast himself over the cliff. The yielding tree

ben .ower and lower, till the hunter touched the firm earth, then it whizzed up and stood on the crag-top in its usual place.

The Indian and his victim stood some hundred yards away. Would he reach her in time!

The fatal knife ascends. God of mercy, he has struck her.

Now the crack of a rifle comes through the air and the savage looks around. At that instant he is grasped firmly from behind, a long glittering knife gleams above his head and the hoarse voice of Paul Howard rang in his ears.

"Dog of an Indian. Accursed demon. Slayer of my wife! perish! perish!"

The knife was buried to the hilt again and again, the rifle was dashed once, thrice, and many times against the gory face and body of the Indian, who whooped and shrieked in his dying agony. Then the rifle was again beaten against the battered face, and the red fiend perished.

Then, by his dying wife's side the hunter knelt and wildly and in a hollow voice cried out:

"Nellie, my wife—speak to me! you are not dead—no, no! speak to me!"

The poor head raised, the cloudy, misty eyes opened, and the wound in her breast bled afresh.

"Paul, dear husband," came slowly from the pallid lips, as the face wreathed into a sad, wan smile, "they have stolen our child. I tried to save it, indeed, I did; but it was in vain. He is gone and I am dying."

"No, Nellie, you will live to make me happy and to find our child!"

"Heaven has deemed otherwise, Paul, dear; the man who robbed me of poor little Kate, was Dick Dalton; 'twas he that led the Indians on to slaughter us, and 'twas he that we befriended years ago. He told the Indian you have slain to murder me, and he has done it."

"The outlaw, the renegade! oh, my vengeance will fall heavy on that wretch," cried Paul, near frantic.

"It was cruel of Dick, very cruel. I used to treat him very kindly when he lived here, and he never thanked me. But it is over now, and he has stolen little Kate. Oh! what a fate will be hers. Promise me, dear Paul, that you will leave no work undone to find her."

In a choked voice, while tears rolled down his brown cheeks, he solemnly promised her.

"And now I can die in peace. You will find her, I know; I feel you will. It may be years hence, but it will come. There, darling, don't weep so, if little Kate was here, I'd die so happy. Hold me tight, close to your heart; bring me on the river's bank near the gnarled oak; 'tis there where my poor mother sleeps, and 'tis there I wish to lie."

"Oh, Nellie, Nellie! you will break my heart."

The death film was covering the dying woman's eyes as she slowly said:

"I see a dark valley and a bleak mountain. It grows lighter; sweet music comes on the air, the mount fades. I see a halo of light—look, Paul, look on the lovely sight; all is brightness, peace. I see groups of angels—Heaven ——"

The mission of Nellie Howard was done, and her soul took its eternal flight from earth forever.

Wild sobs rent the strong man's breast; then the hands clenched, and a look of fierce hate settled on his face; a look that never left it till his death. He arose, and then gave vent to his passionate thoughts.

"The hour I have so long feared has come at last. My child stolen, my wife murdered; all gone; and I stand in the world alone. Dick Dalton, renegade and of all hell's fiends, from this day forth, look to yourself. I go upon your track to revenge myself on you, and rescue my child. Beast; inhuman dog, better come between the tiger and his wrath, than fall in my way, for the hour that we meet, murder will be done. I swear it over the cold, lifeless body of my slaughtered wife. Accursed be the entire race of the red man, and may its doom be near at hand."

Then the head sank on the dead bosom of the poor, cold wife. The flames of the burning cabins still roared and licked their fiery tongues, and never stopped till but cinders and ashes remained.

The afternoon passed, and the sun went down, and the darkness of night fell on the vast west. And when the bright moon arose, its rays fell upon the silent ruined settlement, upon the phantom-like face of the dead settlers and their lifeless foes, and upon the form of the heart-broken hunter, who still knelt and moaned piteously by the side of his murdered wife, in the ghastly moonlight.

His child stolen, his wife a corpse, the future of the lonely hunter looked desolate and dreary.

CHAPTER II.

THE MOUNTAIN CABIN—HAGER AND ZOE—A WILD NIGHT.

SIXTEEN years had passed since the dreadful massacre that destroyed Sunnyside, and left Paul Howard a broken-hearted, childless man.

All his efforts to regain his child proved vain and useless; the renegade and his prize had gone from out his reach, and so the long weary years had passed.

Sixteen years after, on a wild and desolate night, in a wilder and more desolate place, we introduce two important characters in the backwoods drama.

In the rough apartment of a mountain cabin, sitting before the log fire that burned low and uncertain, were the figures of two females.

The first was a young and slender girl of some sixteen or seventeen years of age, clear, ruddy complexion, with cheeks like the tint of roses, large, lustrous, dark blue eyes, a skin as fair and soft as ever graced a city belle, and hair that looked as she sat in the light of the fire, as if a shower of gold had fell and enveloped her shoulders and head to make her seem more beautiful.

The other female was a less romantic-looking person, being a grim hardened-looking woman of some sixty years or more, with gaunt hollow cheeks, the bones of which stood out sharp and high, a low, narrow, wrinkled forehead; her sharp, snapping grey eyes were sunk far back in her head, and a scanty supply of dark, rusty hair, covered it.

Dressed in a ragged patched gown, with a piece of cloth tied around her head, and a grim, sinister look on her witch-like face, she sat also beside the cabin fire.

It was a miserable, poverty-stricken hut, one long narrow room, on one side a black looking fire-hearth, on another side a rough though clean-looking bed, and near it a small pine table, a couple of well worn chairs, and a miniature shelf on which were three or four well-handled books. These completed the extensive stock of the mountain cabin.

And if its interior was wretched, the exterior was doubly so—it was built on the ledge of a steep precipice, rocky and rough. Where the waterfall of the mountain cataract dashed and roared like the universal shriek of a demon. Many feet above, on the other side of the cliff, the torrent fell tumbling over the rocks and stumps that barred its free progress to the immense fall that outrivaled them all.

The night was a dark and stormy one, black and dense as pitch, and a heavy, ceasless rain fell, and at times the wild mountain wind would moan and wail around the old cabin, and then great drops of rain would come down the chimney and fall hissing and spattering on the log fire below. Then again, at various intervals, the roar of thunder and the dazzling lightning, would make the scene more spectral and unearthly.

It was near eight o'clock, when the curtain arises on our opening scene, and still the two women set in silence by the fire. The old woman at length breaks the silence, and we start at the croaking voice.

"Will the storm never cease, I wonder? All yesterday,

all to-day, and most likely all night, it's done nought but rain, rain; pest on the rain devils, say I."

A deep sigh came from the young girl, whose sweet clear tones thus answered.

"It's very disagreeable and lonely to be shut up here in this lone some spot; if it were only clear, I could be much happier, but——"

"You're tired of old Nancy, that's what you would say, ah; well, I don't wonder; old people is no company for youth, that's always the way, and you are like the rest, like the rest. I nussed ye since a babe, and it is not because your father gives me gold to care for you that I love you so much, no, no; the love I bear you, Zoe, is deep, deep love that knows no end."

"And I am greatful, dear Hager, for all you have done for me."

"Ah, well," sighed Hager as she rocked herself to and fro; "I know I'm old and childish, that I am grim and ugly, that I bear a bad name, and that the settlers call me the old mountain witch, and shun and dread the sight of me and my home, if home I can call this place. No one comes here except your father, and that's very seldom, of late."

"Oh, Hager! I never hear his name uttered, but a sense of shame and despair comes over my heart. Why is he so merciless to the white men? his own color, his own race! What have they ever done to him that he hates them so? Surely you must know, who have known him these twenty years or more."

"Yes; I have known him many years, and never knew any good of him," was the cold answer.

"But his lawless life—his hatred of the white race—what made him thus?"

The woman drew her stool closer to the young girl, and thus narrated her story:

"Rejected love drove him to all this. Many years ago, he loved a pretty girl in the settlement three miles off, called at that time "Sunnyside." He proposed, was scorn-

fully rejected. He was a bad man then, but that drove him to be a demon. The young girl soon after married a young hunter named Paul Howard, and that night he swore a fearful oath against his successful rival. From that hour I mark his ruin. He joined a band of Indians, became in time their leader, and one night he planned the destruction of the settlement where his foes had their homes.

"The next day about noon, the place was attacked; all were murdered, even the wife of the hunter.

"Your father made off with the child of Paul Howard, took her to the Indian village, with the intention of gratifying his revenge on the hunter, who still lives, they say—by making his enemy's child a slave and drudge to his devil's-squaw of an Indian wife. But ere he wed his present wife, he had married a beautiful half-breed, who was your mother, of course. But in giving birth to you, she died, and your father, Dick Dalton, soon after married "Forest Flower"—devil's flower say I—but she liked the fire-water too much. He took you, his child away, and sent you to me, while he gloated in joy to see the enemy of his earlier days, hunt and search in vain for his lost child, while, it was treated, and is to this day like a slave and beast in the wigwam of the renegade's squaw."

The face of Zoe was scarlet with indignation; her lips were compressed, and she scornfully said:

"And he is my father; cruel man that he is, to thus rob a father of his child, and treat it thus."

"The hatred that he bears the father, now falls upon the offspring, and all your entreaties to him on behalf of the daughter of Howard would be of no avail."

"I used to hear whispering of this affair, but never understood it until now. He is not worthy my love—love did I say—do I love him as a child should love its parent? No; for when his hand touches mine, I shudder. When I see his form approach me I grow weak, and a pain smotes me. And why these awful emotions? Because the stain of blood and murder is on his soul, and the

curse of multitudes of his own race has fallen on him! Oh, Hager, Hager! how can such a man as he is, press his pillow at night? What wild and hideous dreams must visit him in the waste of night, with all these crimes on his soul.'

The daughter of the renegade was now pacing the floor with rapid strides, and in her excitement she looked, indeed, grand.

Strange it was that a man so base as Dick Dalton was could look upon a beauty and such a good-hearted girl and claim her as his daughter.

Hager still sat by the weird fire and looked upon the excited girl, a strange light in her eye, and a mysterious smile upon her withered face.

Zoe walked to the small window, pushed aside the rag curtain, and looked out into the stormy night.

The storm still continued with unabated fierceness, and through the wind and rain of the night the awful deafening roar of the mountain torrent, swollen to its utmost limit, fell upon the ears of our strange actors.

"How terrible the night is! Hager, is there no danger? This cabin is situated on the very edge of the precipice, and it is very old. Do you feel how it shakes?"

"Ah, but it has stood the fury of greater storms than this for many and many a year," answered old Hager, quietly; "but come, honey, 'tis time you were in bed, and when you arise in the morning, a pleasant day, I'm sure, will greet you."

Zoe complied with her request.

An old curtain, composed of some Indian blankets, divided the bed from the open room. In this recess, a low couch stood, on which our heroine nightly reposed.

The renegade's daughter entered this small space, sank upon the rude bed, and in a few minutes her sound, deep breathing proclaimed that slumber held her in deep chains, despite the clang and noise of the tempest without.

CHAPTER III.

DALTON, THE RENEGADE—A DARK PLOT—THE LISTENER ZOE RESOLVES TO WARN THE SETTLERS—THE MISSION OF MERCY.

THE old woman still sat before the hearth, buried in deep thought.

At times, she would chuckle and lightly laugh to herself, and then her keen sharp eyes would wander towards the blanket behind which Zoe slept.

"She does not suspect, she does not know what I do, poor thing! No, no; the time has not come yet when Dick Dalton and I shall settle our old quarrel together. I must wait; put on my mask, and bide my time. Oh, fool, fool that you are, Dalton, to thus have trusted me, the woman you once so foully wronged, whose husband fell by your hand, and whose unavenged murder still cries out for summary justice on your head!"

And now Hager rocked to and fro, so painful and revengeful were her thoughts.

"And I was calm and still, for I saw a means of carrying out my deep revenge, and bringing a life-long curse upon him. I knew his one great weakness—love for his child. I acted upon that, and my work goes bravely on. Ah! but he little dreams of my secret, and never will, until, in his hour of triumph, I swoop down upon him and reveal it. Then, Dick Dalton, my mission will be fulfilled! Sleep on, good Zoe, sleep in peace; for the day is not far distant when my mother's and my husband's murders will be terribly avenged, and then, poor old Hager's work on earth will be over at last!"

Silence reigned in the mountain cabin, and the storm seemed to have slightly abated.

"It was on such a night as this when my poor husband was murdered, twenty years ago—murdered as he passed through the forest with his silver bag. Indians attacked him; but who was the villain that struck the blow and set the savages on? It was Dick Dalton! for I watched him, and as the death blow was struck a flash of lightning revealed to my gaze the face of the assassin, and it was he. But of this he does not know, and so he trusted to my care his enemy's child and his own. But I tricked him; how cleverly, time will tell."

What silent revenge had this strange woman taken? what meant her wild, unmeaning words, and why her fierce, merciless looks?

Follow attentively on, reader, and all these emotions will be fully explained.

The rain, at this time, had ceased to fall. The roar of the torrent still deafened the air, and the vivid flashes of lightning were more powerful but less frequent, and the thunder rumbled and cracked through the dark heavens.

A heavy foottall was crashing through the old tree stumps, and over the sandy, rocky path that led to the cabin door, and shortly, a milk-white horse could be discerned through the gloom of the night, picking its way carefully through the dangerous pass on the cliff.

At Hager's door it stopped. Its rider dismounted, and tied the steed to the branch of a neighboring tree, just as the head of the old woman peered out of the window of the hut.

"Who, and what want ye here?" said her shrill, harsh voice. "Indian or white man, I am armed."

"It's I, Hager. Devil take me! don't ye know me? Open the door; I am wet through to the very skin."

It was Dick Dalton, the renegade, that spoke, and old Hager answered:

"Oh, it's you, eh? Wait a second, and I will let you in. Softly, now, for Zoe sleeps."

The window was reclosed, and going to the strong door Hager opened it, and ushered in a dark, tall man, of some fifty years of age, dressed in a costume half-civilized, half-Indian, with long black wiry hair and beard, which, in contrast with his thin, pale, ghost-like face, resembled the gloomy hero of Dion Boucicault's drama of the "Phantom of Raby," that vampyre of the abbey.

And this man we see before us was a dark-souled renegade—a foe to his people, and a faithful servant of Satan.

He entered the room, threw himself before the fire, which Hager now stirred up to a lively glow.

His first question was asked in a quick, anxious voice, while his cold eye beamed with a strange light, for such a cruel man as he was.

"Where is Zoe, Hager? Ah! I forgot; you said she was sleeping. Poor thing! the is tired and weary, I suppose?"

"And unhappy; and ever will be until you give up being the settler's foe. She has heard of your dark deeds, of your cruelty to the hunter's daughter; and had you seen her as I did, when she heard of it, you would have been surprised."

"Hager, how heard she of that hunter's brat? Have you been telling her? Speak the truth, I say."

"I know my duty," replied the woman, coldly. 'Sometimes Indian scouts pass this way, and she has heard them, no doubt, speak of the fact."

"Curses on the tongues that spoke the words!" growled the renegade. "I have tried hard to keep the knowledge of that from her, and now for her to know all! Can you not deceive her, in some way?"

"That is impossible. Three days ago, a party of Indian hunters passed by, and they were speaking in broken English about you and your lovely daughter here, and laughed with derision at your slave in the Indian village, the victim of your wife's cruelty. Often, since then, she has asked strange questions, and now she is convinced that her devoted father is a villain and a renegade."

"Come, Hager, no hard words or names, or we may quarrel. What can I do to drive this thought from her mind?"

"Leave off the red life you are now living, Dick Dalton, or your child will, ere long, hate you."

"Never! I am too far gone to retrace my steps. I live now only for revenge on those I hate. There was a time when I might have made a better man than I now am, and it rested with the proud mother of Kate Howard to have made me so; but she refused my love, and I am having ample revenge on her child; ha, ha!"

That awful laugh made old Hager shudder. There was in her power now a notorious murderer, whom heaven, she thought, would justify in killing. There, before her, sat the destroyer of hundreds, the assassin of her cherished husband, whose murder cried aloud for vengeance.

All these wild thoughts rushed to her excited brain, and her bony hand clutched the dagger within her bosom. Would she send him, in all his sin, to hell? No; the time had not yet come—her long-cherished revenge was not complete; she must wait and bide her time.

She drew her hand from out her bosom and the tempting murderous weapon that lay there, and was the humble, obedient Hager, as before.

"I haven't looked at Zoe these many days. I must take a peep at her," suddenly exclaimed Dalton, arising, and going towards where his daughter slept; "then I have something to tell you, Hager."

The renegade carefully raised the old blanket, and looked upon sleeping Zoe.

He stood there a few seconds, gazing at his child, and bad wretch that he was, he felt a pang of deep regret.

But the good angel was thrust aside, and in its place Satan, with his jeers, was taunting him.

He let the old curtain drop, and when it closed out from his sight that form that lay there, so died out of his heart all good and repentant thoughts.

But as the old blanket dropped and closed in Zoe, her

eyes opened, and she silently raised her head and looked out of an old hole in her blanket into the room where old Hager and Dalton sat.

"What is that he is about to tell her? some plot, no doubt. I must listen. Oh, father, father, what a wretch you are!" was the poor girl's silent cry as she watched and listened.

Dick Dalton was beginning to speak.

"Zoe sleeps, and soundly, too, so I can tell you without fear. I shall be absent, after this night, from the Indian village for some days, and I hope you will closely watch Zoe and not let her wander far from the cabin—do you hear?"

For Hager was beginning to nod, as if she was tired of her visitor and his conversation.

"Yes, I hear; what devil's work is up now, eh? more raids on white people; more flat-boat decoys?"

"We attack the settlement of Bankville to-morrow night; the place is well stocked with horses and cattle, and we are mighty slim on those articles at present, and we must have provisions, and that's the only means of getting them; so, keep Zoe near the cabin, and keep your eyes open—it's time I was off. Don't forget what I've told ye, or ye may upset it. I wouldn't have Zoe get wind of the affair for a mint of money, for I am getting a vast amount of sport from this attack, and must keep it silent."

He pulled the old hat over his eyes, and went towards the door, and opening it, said:

"The storm has cleared off, and the morrow will be a brilliant day for our glorious attack; ha, ha! Well, good bye, old woman; remember my instructions, and woe to you if you disobey them!"

Out to his horse went the renegade. He nimbly leaped upon the saddle, settled the reins, and off with a gallop. Down the sandy path rode the man of blood on his snow-white steed, with thoughts in his plotting brain as black and dark as the night that surrounded him.

Hager listened to his horse's echoing footsteps, and when they died out she gave vent to her tempestuous feelings.

"There rides a devil on his road to Hades, curses on him, the bloodthirsty villain! Has he no heart, that he can calmly plot the murder of his own people? Why does heaven not strike him down? To-morrow night you will attack Bankville, eh? We shall see if they are not prepared for you. I will foil you in this scheme. I am old, but I shall reach the settlement before you, and then——"

"I shall go in your place, Hager."

The blanket of Zoe's couch was thrust aside, and Zoe herself stepped forth as she uttered the above words.

Old Hager started, as if a serpent had stung her, and looked at the brave, good-hearted girl.

"Have you been awake and heard all—the base plotting of your father?" was the old woman's first question.

"God help me! I have heard all, and I am resolved to warn the unsuspecting settlers of their impending fate. You are old, weak, infirm—I am young and strong, I will save them," said Zoe.

Hager clasped her in her thin arms, and showered kisses upon the head of Zoe, then, through her tears, said:

"Brave girl, good child! What a contrast to your cruel father!"

"Don't call him my father!" exclaimed Zoe, in disgust, "he is a dishonor to his race—I almost hate him! To-morrow morning I shall start for Bankville—'tis but three miles off. I can reach it by noon, warn its residents and return home ere nightfall, and Dick Dalton be none the wiser when he meets the white settlers."

"My dear girl, you must be very careful; the forest may be full of savages. They would recognize you, inform your father, and then——"

"Kill you, brute that he is!" said Zoe, finishing the sentence. "But don't fear on that score, Hager. I shall completely disguise myself. You remember the Indian

girl that was murdered by her jealous lover last Spring in the lower woods? After she was wrapped in the dress you buried her in, you preserved her Indian dress, and sometimes use it now. I shall fit myself in it, dye with some leaves my face and hands, and should I meet Dalton himself he would fail to recognize me. Leave this to me —I will succeed."

A bright smile illumined the old lady's withered face; the idea was a capital one.

"I am sure you will be successful, Zoe, and God will bless you on your errand of mercy."

Long into the night the two women sat and planned and talked, and it was very late when their weary heads were pillowed in sleep.

When the sun arose the next morning, the female figure of a bronzed Indian girl came out of the mountain cabin, a knife in her girdle, and a small rifle swung across her shoulders.

Out on the rocky pass, down the sloping mountain road, and then into a deep tangled wood, through mud and mire, went the brave-hearted Zoe on her perilous errand, to warn the white settlers of the awful doom that was overshadowing them the coming night.

CHAPTER IV.

BANKVILLE—SAMMY SWIPES' TROUBLES—THE TIMELY WARNING OF THE INDIAN GIRL.

TIME—Ten o'clock in the morning of a lovely day.

Place—Bankville Settlement, on the western border of Kentucky.

And a good strong-proof place it was, numbering some hundred or two souls within the rough log wall.

Some years ago, Harry Banks and a score of sturdy

pioneers had built and settled the place that now bore its founder's name; and as years advanced the "town" grew rapidly in numbers.

Since their advent there, they were but seldom troubled by their forest foes. It was a spot the Indians never fell upon; yet it was situated in a wild, romantic place, and seemed the very spot that they would select for a massacre. A thick circle of sturdy trees surrounded the entire settlement. A square, firmly-built wall, thick, stout and ten feet high, made of the stoutest of forest logs, encircled Bankville. The cabins were built in a line on each side, facing each other, thus making some five or six miniature streets. Each cabin was one story in height, and possessed a neat garden, where some raised flowers, other vegetables, and various products, ornamental and substantial.

But lowering high above all others the brazen building called the "Block-house" rose in the centre.

It was a grim, dark-looking fort, three stories high, with a large, ponderous door and loop-windows on every side. It would have taken a strong and powerful foe to have made an impression on that stupendous building. It well built in every respect, and better still, it was well stocked, and always kept so with a large quantity of powder, balls, rifles, knives and provisions within its vast and firm good walls.

About ten o'clock on the morning following the scene we have witnessed in the mountain cabin, the settlement was alive and very active, beginning the duties of the day.

The small cabin shutters were all thrown open to admit the fresh balmy air of the clear morning. Little children sat at many doors, amusing themselves in their childish ways, while bronzed-faced backwoodsmen now and then lounged about the "streets," as they loved to designate them, and on the calm air snatches of old songs would be borne along.

Some men were weeding their gardens, others splitting

huge logs for their family use. It was a pleasant, tranquil scene on this beautiful morning.

In one of the gardens attached to a cabin a thin, sleek-looking man was engaged in weeding and planting some late vegetables.

He was, perhaps, forty-five years old. With a scarred, wizened little face as thin and poor as a church mouse, two small, watery-looking eyes, long, lank legs, and feet like an elephant's in size. Altogether, this personage was a decidedly "comical coon," as the boys say.

From within the cabin came the piping voice of a woman engaged in singing, or rather shrieking, the very inappropriate lines of

"I am a forest rose, I am a forest flower,
I am a gay young girl, and my temper's never sour."

The noble specimen you in the garden is Mr. Sammy Swipes, and the angelic, entrancing voice you hear from within is his loving, tender spouse, Mrs. Lucinda Swipes.

"Hang that cussed cat! She's spilled every pan of my best cream! Oh, you shall pay for this!"

Thus said the angelic voice from the cabin a few minutes afterwards, and immediately after a great black feline leaped through the open window, and in its sudden flight overturned a dish of fried tomatoes, which stood cooling on the narrow window-sill. It dropped with a crash, and Mr. Swipes, in a trembling voice, said:

"Oh, Lord? there will be no peace for me to-day. Her dander's up, and she's biling over, I know," alluding to his wife.

He went on with his work in the garden; but had not done so many moments before a window or shutter on the opposite house opened, and the hard, sharp-featured face of a lady was thrust out, with long corkscrew curls and very red cheeks.

This romantic-looking female was Miss Sally Ann Mugg, a maiden lady of some forty-two years old, though she strongly claimed to be "Just twenty-seven," and had

been twenty-seven these many years, and likely to remain that age.

Up to her present age she had schemed and failed to get a husband, but did not give up the field yet, by no means.

A sister, five or six years younger than Miss Sally was her only companion, named Betty. Her nature was kind and amiable, while that of her illustrious sister Sally, was decidedly uneven and foolish.

Mrs. Swipes and Miss Sally were on bad terms, Mrs. Swipes being extremely jealous, and Miss Mugg being decidedly coquettish in their respective natures.

Poor Swipes had a tedious life of it between the two. Miss Sally insisted on having long chats with the fascinating Mr. Swipes, while Mrs. Swipes declared that "that old maid" was seeking to entice her husband from his lawful wife.

Thus matters stood as Miss Mugg's graceful head popped out of the window on the opposite side of the cabins.

"What's the matter, Mr. Swipes?" asked the spinster. "Deary me! how ye did skeer me, to be sure!"

"Darn that old maid! there will be another row now," said poor Swipes, to himself; then aloud:

"Nothing, Miss Sally; only the cat." And went on with his work.

"Wich cat what do ye mean, Mr. Swipes? he, he!"

And Miss Sally laughed maliciously at her cutting joke as she thought it was

Mr. Swipes saw the joke, felt the point, and trembled, as he wondered at his wife's unusual quietness within.

"What do ye mean, Miss Sally?" asked poor Sammey, going on with his work, and wishing Miss Sally in Hades.

"He, he!" and the old maid showed her teeth—false ones, the people said. "Why, ye have got two cats in yer house—the black one, and one rather older and——" but her head bobbed suddenly within.

Mrs. Swipes could stand no more; her temper was limited. She had been insulted—she would be revenged.

A soft, useless piece of fat pork, that was stale and unfit to cook, stood near by. She grasped it firmly, and before the sarcastic spinster could finish her sentence, the greasy lump of pork whizzed through the air, and landed with full force against the curtain of the old maid's window.

That frail article, of course, gave way, and the flying pork landed plump at a large dinner pot that hung over a log fire. The hooks were old and weak, and the force of the blow against the pot overturned it, and the consequence was that Miss Mugg had a late dinner that day.

She was about to rush to "that awful woman;" but her more collected sister held her back.

At last, Miss Sally complied, but vowed deep vengeance on Mrs. Swipes at some future time.

Mrs. Swipes rushed out to where her spouse was at work, snatched the hoe that he was using, and grasped poor Sammy, with the intention of chastising him.

But he, unlucky fellow, rushed pell-mell for the cabin door, and had reached it when Mrs. Swipes caught him by the end of his buckskin frock. It was old and rotten.

She raised her hoe to strike, when suddenly the frock of her husband gave way, and she fell with a splash and a thump into a round box of sour milk, dish-water and stale eatables used for the pigs

Poor Swipes caught "jessie" that morning, and Miss Mugg and her opposite neighbor were fiercer enemies than ever.

* * * * * *

About noonday, when the burning sun was at its height, a weary-looking Indian girl—it was Zoe—entered the settlement and inquired for Harvey Banksvill, the founder and commander of the place.

With the commander came a large group of men, women and children, who gazed with wonder and affright at the supposed Indian maid.

"I am the man you seek," said stout, hearty, bluff-speaking Banksville, coming up.

"I have much information to give you—perhaps the means of saving all your lives."

She sank upon the stump of an old tree with exhaustion, and would have fallen had she not been caught.

"Water, water!" was her cry.

Her request was complied with. It greatly refreshed her and in a few minutes she said:

"I have traveled miles to see you all and warn you of a great peril."

"Warn us of what?" asked Banksville.

"Of the Indians."

"The Indians!" was the cry all around, and in one voice, as fear and dismay overspread the faces of the people.

"Yes, the Indians. I will tell you all. I have overheard the scheme planned. A ferocious tribe of Indians have plotted the massacre of these people and this place, headed by a white renegade."

"His name, his name!" was the excited cry of the settlers.

"I shall not tell you; be thankful that I warn you in time. The foe you meet to-night are the strongest and most savage in the entire West. Be prepared to meet them. Guard well your homes, your village, and your surrounding wall. Midnight is the time fixed for their assault. They will come silent and stealthy as the swamp panther does ere he leaps upon his victim. They number in their midst warriors and experienced scouts. In meeting them you meet a resolute, merciless foe."

"The villains, the rascals! but they will find us perpared to give them a warm welcome, a greeting they won't forget in some time; so don't be skeered you women folks, if ever they were surprised, the darned redskunks will sing this night; so cheer up young gals and old gals, and you pale babies, for Harry Banksville answers for yer safety, and chew me up if I don't keep my word," cheerfully said the old commander, his fat face very red, and his little eyes very bright, as he quote the following.

"Cheer up Sam don't let yer spirits go down."

The Indian girl smiled at the old fellow's cheerfulness and grotesque features and actions, as she said:

"The white chief's counsel to his people is wise; they will succeed, but I had forgotten a main piece of intelligence. As I was passing through the glen of ferns a mile or two from here, I overheard the Indians informing another red man, of a sure plan to make the capture of the white man's village more certain, their plan is this:

"An Indian is to come to the village wall, bleeding and seemingly wounded, you will take him in and bind his affected wounds, and near midnight at a given signal from outside the wall, he is to open and unbar the outer gate, the entire tribe will enter and you know what would follow; blood, murder, destruction and fire."

The commander swore, the people crowded together, and Zoe continued:

"Take him in if he should come, and seem as if you were ignorant of the deceptive part he was playing. He will ask to lie all night outside the cabin door. You must comply, watch well and close his movements, and when the signal is given, and he attempts to unbar the wall gate, shoot him as you would a beast in his act of treachery, and deceit. I have done my errand and must away. It will be late ere I reach my abode," and she arose to depart.

"Who are ye, young woman, that takes such an interest in us whites? yer looks pints ye out as an Injin gal; but spit in my eye of ye don't use the language of a born lady."

"I am one," answered Zoe, fearful lest the truth might be discovered; "who was once kindly treated by your pale race. I owe them a debt of gratitude, and I only wish to repay it. I am the daughter of a chief whom I am ashamed to own. I am a wretched unhappy being, and one I once dearly, fondly loved, comes among the rest to attack you to-night, but I linger. I must go. I have done my duty—the Indian girl bids you farewell. Be on your guard, and heed well my warning."

The thick wall gate was opened, the mysterious Indian girl crossed its portals, and ere long disappeared in the thick forest beyond the enclosure.

CHAPTER V.

THE INDIANS STRATAGEM—THE ATTACK—HOW THE BLOCK-HOUSE WAS SAVED BY A BOY.

All was bustle and confusion in the settlement.

Men, women, and even the children were busily engaged in lending their aid to make their homes as secure as they possibly could be.

Provisions, furniture, bedding, in fact, every thing that the cabins contained were removed into the secure shelter of the stout block-house, for by the accounts given by the Indian girl, gave promise of a severe and bloody struggle.

"Their town might be given to the flames, but the security of the block-house, was by all undoubted. They had but a few hours to prepare, and these they knew, were to be made the most of.

Old Bankville was in what the settlers termed, "an awful humor," he cursed and swore one moment, and called himself an old sinner for doing so the next. Every one that could do so, kept out of his way. The unlucky canines and cats that came in his path were raised higher than they wished. He sternly ordered the men, called the women a nuisance and told them to put these little devils (meaning the children) into the fat and out of the way at once.

They are well used to his stern manners, for he had a kind heart, and they did as he told them.

"To think," he muttered, as he filled some small buckskin bags with shot and bullets; "that these consarned,

copper devils, should attack this place where they have often bin fed, it's a cussed mean action, duned ef it ain't. Why can't they come like men in broad daylight and fight it as they should do? cuss 'em, they must come like snakes, or cowards in the dead o' night, and cut and wizens afore we can defend ourselves. They speak of Injins courage, cuss their courage say I, they're a consarned ugly set a niggers, and every one of em ought to be biled in greese alive; but Lord! how we will warm 'em, the varmints, thank fortin' we've plenty o' powder, ball and sich like, plenty of strong, stout men, not red niggers, which die afore they guv in to the blasted Allergaters. It makes me mad to think on it, it does; spit in my face ef it don't."

Meanwhile the settlers had not been idle; rifles were cleaned, loaded and primed, knives were sharpened and set ready for use, and now they set to work to make their Indian trap.

They dug an excavation or hole on a level, and around the log wall by the large gate, or door, so that those that entered, would on the instant, be plunged headlong into the trap so awfully set for them. It was some six feet wide, and ten in depth, and it took some time to finish it. After it was entirely completed, the old commander appeared coming towards the finished trap, puffing and rolling a good-sized barrel, which he stood on the edge of the pit.

"Come, boys, lets dump this in it, it will make 'em feel sort of comfortable when they air down."

"Why, commander, what in thunder's that?" asked Bill Bouncer, eyeing the barrel closely.

"Glass, ye buster, broken glass; that's bin lying around the place some years. Here give a hand."

They knocked off the head of the barrel, and holding it over the trap-pit they poured out its entire contents. After the glass was well spread at the bottom, the old fellow eyed his plan with satisfaction, as he said:

"Spit in my eye, but won't they holler when they git

to the bottom. How thar lovely countenances will be disfigured, and their beauty spiled, oh, Jerusalum! won't it be gallus, oh no, not at all, ha, ha!"

Then they laid over the pit a square board, and cast a thick covering of clay and dirt over it, not intending to leave it open until they intended to use it.

Everything was in order and readiness, and the afternoon passed and twilight came on.

The women and children all were hud led in the immense block-house, and as the day darkened, so fell darkness on the minds of many of the women.

About dusk there was a loud knock at the wall door, and a low moan was heard outside.

Harvey Bankville heard it, and the Indian girl's tale of a wounded red man applying at the gate flashed across his mind, and his resolution was taken.

He would open the door and admit the Indian, if only to keep up the belief that they were unsuspected.

He opened the gate; and, sure enough, there was the Indian, lying on the outside path, as if wounded.

"Me hurt bad," feebly said the savage, looking up. "Pale màn take Wannotee in he good, much."

"Can't yer walk, Injin, hey? hurt bad?" asked Harvey, feeling as if he could knife the wretch on the spot.

"Ugh!" and Wannotee made a grotesque face. "Me fall—fall high; hurt bad—very bad."

"Spit in my eye! but the varmint knows how to talk," was the verdict of the commander, as he dragged the Indian by the arms into the settlement, and bolting the door behind him.

He laid him on the ground, a few feet from the door.

By this time, many of the settlers grouped around him, with angry looks and tempestuous feelings they strived to suppress, and did.

"Let's see where yer wounded, Injin," asked old Harvey, eyeing the spot where the blood seemed to issue.

"No, no!" cried the treacherous, unsuspecting savage. "Let be—it no much; get well morrer day."

At that moment the commander's eye fell upon the peculiar color of the blood from the savage's wound. A glance told him what it was.

It was not blood, but the scarlet juice of the wild poke-berry.

Night was gradually coming on.

The Indian had been laid on the ground in the shadow of the wall, as he had strongly desired.

Treacherous snake that he was, his base designs were known, and from the moment he entered the place his fate was sealed.

Silence at last fell on the settlement. The men were concealed in the deserted cabins, five in each cabin, while the women and children were securely locked in the block-house.

The night proved a black and cloudy one. Thick, heavy clouds scudded across the moon, now obscuring, for a moment, her brilliant light, and now bursting from the oppression of some heavy cloud, and lighting up the entire settlement.

Thus passed the hours, and midnight was coming on.

Eleven o'clock had just struck in the block-house.

The hour of battle was near; for there, in the distant forest, dark forms were congregated in great and powerful numbers. All were war-painted Indians; but their leader was a white man, though now his face was dyed a savage brown, and his name was Dick Dalton.

Silently they descend, in a long, single line, the hill that leads to the settler's gate. Now some whispered orders are given, and they are at the wall door.

Slowly and cautiously the small figure of a boy, scarce twelve, descends from the block-house roof, where he has been watching. Silently he opens the side door, and as silently goes to the window of each cabin, and whispers in:

"They have come."

They are simple words; but they are understood.

Then the boyish figure, after he has thus warned every

cabin's inmates, gains the fort, enters, bars the stout door, and his task is done.

A peculiar scratching, at this moment, is heard on the outer logs of the wall.

The Indian that was wounded listens; then waits for a second signal from outside.

The wretch arises, looks around, and moves toward the lock of the wall gate.

A shadowy figure closely follows his every movement; it goes where he goes and stops when he stops.

"All is well," he thinks. He is at the gate bar, and is in the act of raising it—but dies before he does it.

For the glistening blade of the watchful shadow falls, and is buried to the hilt in the Indian's thick throat.

There is but a faint, gasping cry, a fall, a biting of the loose dirt, and Wannotee's career is ended.

A little while after a sound was heard, as if some persons were climbing the wall on the gate side, and a few seconds after a host of dark, Indian faces peered over the wall.

All seemed favorable. They grew bolder; and raising their bodies, were in the act of scaling it, but received, for their impudence, a treat they had not bargained for. Twenty sharp cracks of rifles burst upon the midnight air from the cabin windows, and as many red fiends fell back on the wall, dead, or wounded mortally.

Shrieks and savage whoops of rage and surprise filled the air; then the enraged voice of Dick Dalton cried:

"Dash down that accursed gate! Massacre every soul! Spare none! Kill, kill!"

No reply, no stir—all silence within the walls of the settlement.

Stones, logs and tomahawks were used to break down the stout gate. It was a long while before these articles were of any service, but at last the half door began to give in with the blows.

Cries and screams of triumph fill the air. The savages are confident of success; the blows are heavier, and at last it yields.

Twenty, at last, made a rush in; but in another instant they were precipitated, with tremendous force, into the trap or pit so cleverly laid for them. Curses, shrieks and whoops were many; but before they could repeat them, a deadly volley of rifles from the hidden stillness poured sure and immediate death to every savage in the pit. It was done so quick, so sudden, that all the Indians without were taken dumb by surprise, without knowing the fate of their comrades, for the moon was behind a cloud, and everything was dense blackness.

Three or four made a blind rush for the gate, and met the doom of the other twenty's death in the hidden trap.

"Come on, ye red varmints!" cried a familiar voice, "and spit in my eye if we don't make ye hum!"

Just then, the moon came from out the covering of the cloud, and shone as bright as noonday.

The deadly pit and the stark Indians to their comrades were now revealed.

They succeeded in throwing the broken gate over the open trap, and the voice of the renegade cried out, in an Indian tongue:

"Upon the whites—slay all!"

The settlers were together now, and a third volley was fired upon the fiends, as they attempted to cross the broken gate. But all rushed in together, with cries that made a very hell of the place; they, as well as the whites, were well armed, and despite the loss of those in the pit, their numbers exceeded the settlers.

Now began the awful contest.

Some rushed to the fort and battered its doors, in the hope of entering; but a thick shower of bullets from the settlers and a scalding and warmer shower of hot water from the block-house roof quickly dispersed them from that quarter.

Little Toby Green, the boy we beheld at the cabin window, was stationed on the high roof of the fort, lending his aid in casting heavy stones and boiling water—his own sole plan—at the savages when chance afforded.

The moon was behind a cloud now, and all was in darkness.

At that moment an arrow, with a thick, powerful light attached, whizzed upward in the air and buried itself in the side of the block-house, six feet from the roof.

The act was not perceived by the settlers, who were now gaining on the Indians. They fought like tigers; but the settlers were their match in everything. The ranks of the Indians were thinning out. Dick Dalton, with eight or ten, had sneaked in the darkness away from the scene, and but a dozen or two remained.

At last, they were compelled to flee for life.

A cry from the whites near the fort was the next sensation.

The side wall, where the burning arrow had been buried was in flames.

"How on earth can this be quenched? water can never reach it," said one hunter to another.

"I will put it out," came the voice of little Toby on the roof above.

The boy had a long thick buffolo robe. Tying it around an iron bar on the roof, he fastened the other end to a large, strong basket, and taking a great horse blanket soaked in water, he seated himself in the basket, and gradually lowered himself down to where the block-house wall was burning.

"Rash boy, for God's sake, go back; oh, heaven! he will fall," cried the agonized father below.

"Don't be afraid father, I am all right," cheerfully replied the boy as he undid the blanket, and prepared to dash it against and smother the flames.

At that instant the moon came from out the shadow of the clouds, and the boy was fully revealed to all. He dashed the wet blanket against the flames again, and and again, at last with success.

The flames and fire were entirely quenched, and the block-house saved by a boy.

cries of joy and hurrahs, filled the distant woods, and

was echoed back; poor boy, it was his last act on earth, for a savage face saw all, and with dark vengeance in his untutored brain, he raised his murderous arrow, aimed at the boy as he prepared to ascend, then flash the arrow flew.

A faint cry issued from poor Toby, as the fatal messenger was lodged deep in his back and into his heart.

"Father, mother, I am killed," was all he said, as he tipped over the edge of the basket, and fell on the ground at his stricken parents feet, his little fingers were tightly compressed, his eyes wide open, but the spirit had gone, and he was dead.

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CHAPTER VI.

THE SHAWNEE GLEN—THE CAPTIVE—THE INDIAN SORCERESS—DOOMED TO DEATH AT THE STAKE—THE UNKNOWN FRIEND—DELIVERED FROM DEATH.

Deep in the dell where the wild flowers grew, was the picturesque village of the Shawnee Indians. Down in the leafy dell an abode that the fairies might envy, dwelt these forest fiends. Imagine a thick wall of bushes, trees and wild plants, a vast canopy of green leaves where scarcely a ray of the scorching sun could penetrate, a cool, shady spot by day, a quiet, romantic place by night.

A huge granite rock occupied one side, in the centre of which nature had grooved a round excavation, and a trickling cascade of water, rolled down into the natural basin. Near at hand a cool stream went singing by, the flowers that grew on its bank, bent their pretty heads and kissed the stream, all over the leafy dell, the earth was covered by a fresh, green, mossy carpet of verdure.

Scattered here and there, were the dirty looking wigwams of the Indians, some patched and mended, while others were gay and clean.

There were two large and spacious wigwams, separated a small distance from the others.

One was the abode of Dick Dalton the Indian leader, his squaw, and the stolen daughter of the hunter. The other was a flashy looking affair, high and narrow, the outside of which was entirely covered with grotesque fantastical designs. A grim looking human skull was suspended over the opening in the tent used as a door.

This was the sacred wigwam of Ca-tis-ka, the wizard and sorceresus, of the Shawnee Indians.

She was a hard, bony looking hag of perhaps seventy years of age, frightful to look upon, her statue was tall and thin, standing as she did over six feet high, a long shaggy-rope like neck, and a face as appaling and repulsive as the ugliest of Hecates witches that met Macbeth upon the blasted heath. She was a firm friend to the Indians, a bitter murderous foe to the entire race of the whites.

Accompany me reader to the interior of the renegade's wigwam.

Dick Dalton lies in a remote corner on a bed of leaves fast asleep, while a sharp cruel looking Indian woman of perhaps forty years old sits bead-stringing near where he lies.

The other occupant of the wigwam was a poor dead looking girl engaged in splitting in half thick stems of prairie reeds which her stern masters used to form baskets and other articles of.

And the corpse-like being was the hunter's stolen child they said:

But what was it now, after the lapse of seventeen years in the power of Dick Dalton and his cruel Indian wife? Treated like a dog, made an abject slave in the Indian village, a victim to the cruelty of a savage squaw half-fed and ill-used, until the brain and intellect of the child became weak and nervous and shattered by the treatment which she received. And when we now look upon her at the age of eighteen, we find her a poor weak-minded

girl, humble and cowering in dread and fear in the presence of her brutal master and masters. A pale sun-browned face she had, and great wild elf-looking eyes, dull and dead in their blank expression, long black hair falling over her shoulders, on which the marks of the squaws cruelty, were plain and numerous.

Silence reigned in the renegade wigwam.

Suddenly the girl dropped her reed-knife, and the reed she was splinting, and gave a low stifled cry of pain.

The Indian woman leaped to her feet, roughly saying in extremly good English:

"What now, break my reed eh, devil? you're always asleep and careless. What you do, speak."

In a thin voice the girl answered as she wrapped the end of her apron around her bleeding finger.

"Nothing, masters, I only scratched my finger with the knife; it is very sharp."

"I like to cut your throat," fiercely cried the woman; "you always lazy—see, devil," picking up a broken reed; "You broke dis; it good no more only for to give you beating, devil, take dat, dat, dat, now."

The thick reed was uplifted once again, and fell, each time a heavy, smarting blow on the unfortunate girl's bear shoulders, who crept closer to the canvass of the wigwam, as each blow fell, murmering with pain and grief.

At this moment the renegade was awoke by the squaws piping voice.

"What the devil causes that noise?" was his words.

"Dat, Kanta, break good reed, cut her finger, make noise and I give her much whip."

"Well, in satan's name, if you wish to beat her, take her down in the glen and beat to your heart's content? but I won't be disturbed. I want to sleep; do ye hear; I want quiet. Let me be awoke again, that's all," and turning over he again reposed.

The woman shook her brawny fist at the girl, and seated herself again at her work while poor Kanta having

tled up her wounded finger, commenced her reed spliting as before.

It was now about two o'clock, and stillness was upon everything around. It was a lazy hour among the Indians, and under the pitching branches of the thick glen foliage, dusky forms of warriors and children lay lightly slumbering for want of other occupation, so the afternoon wore on until four o'clock.

At that time the distant tramp of feet was distinctly heard, near the mouth of the Indian's glen.

One started to his feet and awoke the others. The approaching footsteps came nearer and nearer.

"It is Red-Fox—an —and brothers returning. Their steps are light, they bring a prize or I am wrong," said one Indian.

Some four minutes after, the entrance to the glen was darkened by two dusky Indians.

"Who bring you, Wa-Ta?" asked one Indian to the new comers.

"A white face prize; a spy whom we captured near the glen; pass, he is here."

Through the glen trees came two warriors bearing between them a white man of middle age, dressed in the costume of a hunter. His arms were pinioned with ropes composed of knotted prairie grass, and great beads of sweat were on his bronzed forehead. Yet from the time he had been captured, not a cry for mercy had escaped him, though he knew that his fate was fixed. His heart and courage were strong, and he was no coward.

The two Indians now procured another strong grass rope, and bound their prize to a tree trunk.

The blanket of every wigwam was raised, and their occupants, men, women and children, came running forth to where the white prisoner was bound.

While they were congregating around him, the canvas of Dick Dalton's wigwam arose, and the renegade followed by his Indian wife, approached the prisoner, who poked with indifferance upon all around him. The face

of Dalton was dyed red, and in dress and appearance, was an Indian chief.

The woman peered into the prisoner's face and grinned, while others more merciless, came up and tested the strength of their hands on his face, and little Indian children in their malicious nature, slyly cast pebbles and stones at the bound and helpless captive, who silently bore all these injuries.

All screamed with laughter at this, but just then Dalton came up, and silence was restored.

"What's this?" were his first words, "prisoner warrior?"

"A spy, great chief," answered Red-Wolf; "captured near the village mouth."

"Confound your sass," now spoke the captive for the first time; "Don't call me a spy, you cowardly set of dogs, I was out trapping, and you know it. Oh! if my arms and limbs were but free, how I would fight my way."

"No doubt you would," sarcastically answered the renegade, fixing his eye upon the captive; "but you shall not have that pleasure. You will never leave this place alive."

"I know that full well. Merey can not be expected. I don't fear death, no not I."

"We shall see—here," to an Indian standing near; "go tell your medicine her presence is wanted.

The messenger sped to the domicile of the sorceress, and summoned her forth.

She appeared five minutes after, and with a firm step, walked towards where the crowd was collected.

"Great chief of the Shawnees, you sent for me?"

"I did," answered Dalton.

"What is your will? and why, when sleep hath fell upon my busy brain, am I thus summoned?"

"A prisoner, great wizard—a pale-faced spy—an enemy to our color and our people."

"A white face, did ye say!" almost shrieked the hag

of Hades; "a prisoner, did ye say? Then my midnight vision of last night comes true—for of a pale-faced captive I dreamed last ni[illegible] Ye found him [illegible]e forest, near our glen?"

"Yes, yes; our Me[illegible]ine speaks true," answered all the savages, in a breath.

"I recognize the paleface as I beheld it in my dream. I prophesy a glorious carnival this night."

Dalton had addressed the wizard, whose eyes were fixed upon the bound captive in baleful triumph.

"What is your will, great sorceress?" he asked, well knowing the answer he would receive. "Do you consent to allow the paleface to go his way unmolested?"

"Demons of eternal fire!" almost shrieked the sorceress, beating her serpent staff in the air, "let the accursed dog of a whiteface escape, to go to his people and swell their already overwhelming numbers? Go, to thicken the enemies of our race? Think of the butchered warriors now rotting in their shrouds, victims of the white devil's growing power. I tell ye, warriors, chief, and wives of murdered Indians, the entire brood of white settlers must be swept with blood from the entire land of the West—the land our Great Spirit bequeathed to our race and founders, until the pale-faced snakes appeared on our large domains, and now the accursed brood spreads like a death-plague over the land. Every pale foe that falls is one less to the living number. Strangle, butcher, burn, tomahawk all—men, women, babes, all, and everything that comes in the path of our future triumph!"

The excited, revengeful hag now stopped for want of breath; her eyes, formerly so watery and dead, now sharp and snapping, with the fires of animal passion so fierce and tigerish for one of her age and weakness of frame, that her presence now reminded an observer of one of those venomous female furies that made the abode of Pluto in Hades, too warm even for that sulphur-loving, individual himself.

Yells of approval came from the Indians.

The renegade was loud in his approval of the wizard's views. He had long since abandoned his home, people, and their manners, and now his mind, his tastes, his nature was Indian in everything.

At last he asked:

"What does our wise prophetess mean to do with the prisoner? What fate does she decree?"

"Death at the stake?" cried the witch, in a shrill voice.

Another scream of approving joy, louder than before, came from the savage multitude.

"Coward! don't think that I fear to die, even at the stake," he defiantly exclaimed. "No; perhaps you think I will plead for life. Of what avail to plead to demons, emissaries of the evil one? Take my life, burn me to ashes, and you will see how a backwoodsman can die."

"Ha, ha, ha!" croaked the old sorceress, making herself more hideous; "hear the white-livered cur talk! He will not fear death—no, no!" and then came nearer the captive, and shrieked in his ear: "no; not until the pile is lighted, not until the greedy flames lick his feet, and then, ha, ha, ha! he'll squirm like a swamp viper in the power of death, and our people shall have a glorious carnival, ha, ha!"

"Out from my sight, infernal witch, sorceress as you are! Your words cannot send fear through my vein. Away! quit my sight! Your presence is a living death!"

"Silence!" cried Dalton; "you have heard your fate; be resigned to it!"

"I scorn to bandy words with you! You are beneath any true man's notice. Your day will come, and it ain't far distant, I hope. Then see if you can meet death as I will. I will not pollute my lips longer in speaking to so despicable a being as you are, chief of the Shawnees!"

"Enough!" commanded Dalton, in anger. "When shall the captive be executed?" to the medicine.

"At midnight!" yelled the infuriated sorceress, bring-

ing down her snake-like staff on the shoulders of the bound captive. "At midnight, the white snake meets his doom!"

They all dispersed to their wigwams, while the unfortunate hunters reflected gloomily on the awful fate that stared him in the face.

The afternoon died into twilight, then fell the shades of night upon the glen-village of the Shawnees.

The night was a dark and gloomy one, there being no moon or stars; the air was sultry, close and oppressive, the leaves around scarcely stirred—great drops of perspiration flowed from the hunter's face.

"I shall die," he murmured, sadly, to himself, "without having fulfilled my sacred oath to my poor wife, the oath I made upon the field of massacre—to find my stolen child. I have searched all these years, these long and weary years, in vain. In vain have been my efforts to gain a clue to the discovery of my poor lost darling, stolen on the day when my wife was murdered, sixteen long years ago. I now stand doomed to perish; to leave the world forever, to die ere my sacred oath is fulfilled. Well, well, heaven's will be done!"

So the long, weary hours went slowly by, until some three hours before the fixed hour of execution.

The Indian village in the glen was deep and silent in slumber.

It was somewhere in the vicinity of eleven o'clock, and the awful, offensive heat of the night increased.

The captive hunter suddenly started, and tried to pierce the thick gloom of the night.

A human hand had touched his bound and swollen hands, and a soft, low voice whispered in his startled ears:

"Utter not a word—I will cut the cords. All depends on our silence and discretion."

It was the voice of a woman that spoke. It was the hands of a woman that were silently cutting the cords asunder.

"Bless you, whoever you are!" he fervently said; "you save me from a fearful fate."

The cords that bound his limbs were now cut through by his mysterious friend.

"In heaven's name, who are you, and why, and by what means have you done me this service?"

"Ask me not who I am. I am no Indian, rest assured. Ask no more, for I shall answer nothing. Silence! not a word. Our path now lies thick with perils. Come softly."

The cords of his arms and neck were now free, and fell in strings to the ground.

Their path now was through the wigwams. Villagers and Caugers beset them at every turn. The girl Zoe (for it was that heroic girl) held the hunter's hand and guided him past the tents where the savages slept.

The greater part of their perils was past. The opening of the glen was reached with safety.

They pulled the thick bushes aside, and now stood upon the bank of a dark, flowing lake, where the splashing sound of the water, as it rolled around, was distinctly heard; and as the gloom of the night was too intense without the dark glen, objects were more discernible now.

They were in a desolate, lonely spot. Bare, dead trees stood grimly near the river's bank, and looked like grim spectres of gloom guarding the steep margin of the lake.

"Come," said the midnight guide. "Yonder, hidden away among these reeds, lies a stout canoe. Seat yourself in it now, as silently and swiftly as lightning. Its oars, you will find, are muffled. You must make speed, for see the mouth of the upper lake, and you are safe. Go!" and she disappeared.

The canoe the next instant shot off like a winged arrow up the dark lake, through the black starless night to freedom and safety.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ESCAPE—THE CASCADE CAVERN AND THE DWARF MEGANEO—THE THUNDERBOLT—HUT ON FIRE—THE HUNTER AND THE DWARF—TO THE RESCUE.

On the dark bosom of the lake, the canoe of the rescued hunter was swiftly lengthening the distance between him and his murderous foes. Nothing was heard far or near, save the dull threading sound of the muffled oars, and the far off din of the mountain cascade.

The night advanced. Midnight passed, and still the lonely boatman plied his oars.

"It is long past midnight, I am sure," spoke the boatman to himself; "and morning won't be far off when I reach the cascade cave. Heavens, how awful this night is; not a breath of air, all silence and suffocating heat. Surely this must be the calm that precedes the storm, and now I must make haste or the tempest will overtake me. How Neganebo must be anxious, at my unusual absence; poor devoted fellow, his heart is a tender one though his body is deformed."

The hunter now felt large drops of water falling on his face and hands, a muttering in the heavens was heard. The rain had began to fall.

Faster, swifter sped the canoe, nearer, closer, more distinct came the noise of the mammouth torrent.

Now the water became restless and in some places rushing—wider and wider, grew the stream.

The rain fell heavier, and the noise of the cascade grew louder, and as the boat turned an angle near the bank, the grand imposing mountain torrent came in full view.

Up on the peak of the loftiest cliff stood the old cabin of Hager and Zoe.

The storm was increasing, the rain fell heavier, the heavens seemed bursting, flashes of lightning at times revealed the awful sublime tableaus of the lonely peaks, and the lonelier hut that stood on it.

A thick mammoth range of dark rocks stood directly opposite the principal cascade.

Over the now high and leaping waves the canoe rode on, and every flash of lightning discovered the frail bark, tossed on the waters like a shell.

At last the boatman ceased his rowing, and stopped before the front of a hollow looking rock.

The hunter put his fingers to his mouth, and there came a shrill, piercing shriek.

As the cry died away above the din of the elements, a glad yell seemed to issue from the rock; then as the flash of the lighted torch appeared at the opening, and the next instant a goblin-like piece of humanity uttering a glad cry of welcome, ran to the verge of the rock, and in an anxious voice asked:

"Safe back master, thank the Lord."

"Yes, good Neganbo, back again. Come take my hand and pull—there, now—now I am safe."

With the aid of the queer looking personage, the late captive was safely landed on the low rock, and with a long hook-pole, they managed to raise the canoe and set it back in the hollow of the rock.

The goblin took up the torch and led the way into a gloomy opening in the cave, going before and holding the blazing torch high above his head.

He was a poor, deformed, mulatto dwarf, frightful and hideous in his deformity, a large close haired head he had, his height did not exceed four feet, but what he lacked in length, was made up in breadth of statue. His arms were long and thick, reaching nearly to his feet which were double the size of an ordinary man's. The joint of one of his limbs was, and had been crippled

many years, causing him to limp and bend at every step.

His face was most horrible; a light colored skin, with two large rolling and deep blood-shot eyes, the whites of which were almost as red as blood, the mouth was large and savage, and the teeth long, sharp and glittering, and his costume consisted of a pair of loose hunting trowsers, and a short trapper's jacket.

The hunter and his attendant passed through dark stony caverns damp with slime and dripping water.

A light now gleamed from behind a crevice in the rocks ahead.

They came to a staircase now, the work of Neganoo, which was composed of large flat slab-like rocks, laid on top of the other rising at the top some ten feet.

The dwarf now reached the end of the stone flight, and standing on the level rock above, pushed aside a thick black canvass curtain, and both men entered the cascade cave.

It was a wide and well ventilated cavern, three large openings being in the sides of the rocky wall, and overlooking the lower lake. But at nightfall these openings were covered with thick bear-skins, that the light might not be seen. Its walls were clean, dry, and often washed with lime, being now as white as snow. Its rough floor was entirely covered with thick Indian blankets, a rough tree table stood in one corner, and a tempting meal was on it now. Two rustic stools stood near by, and a strong fire of logs burned in a naturally formed hearth. At the upper part of the cave, a couple of rifles were hung on the wall, and a numerous collection of bear and buffalo robes, trophies of many a hunting victory were formed into sleeping couches.

The dwarf entered first, followed by our hunter. The former cast his torch in a crevice, where it stood firmly, while the latter tossed his skin cap on a small stand, and taking off his rain drenched hunting jacket, hung it before the warmth of the cave fire.

The dwarf busied himself in arranging his master's

meal, while the hunter seated himself at the rustic table.

"Well, master," asked the deformed; "now tell me, how you come to arrive so late."

"Were you so anxious, Neganbo?"

"I was indeed, master; I watched by the cave opening till the dead sultry heat came on, and threatened a storm; and as the night came on and advanced, Neganbo grew anxious. I prepared supper—you did not come. At midnight a black screaming bird of the mountain, whom they say warns people of sure danger to those they love, dashed against my face. Midnight passed, the storm came on, Neganbo despaired, hope died within his heart, when the signal came that told me my master was calling me; and now the poor slave is happy."

The deformed fell at the feet of his loved master and bowed his head. The hunter kindly patted it and said:

"Is your affection for me so great then poor fellow?"

"It is, it is; you are the only being I love on earth. You are the only one that ever spoke a kind word to me. Do I love you? Whom but you should I care for? Who rescued the hideous deformed dwarf from the deep river into which his unnatural parent cast him, because his form was an eye-sore and a curse to her? Who took him to his home in this cavern, and treated him with kindness? Who taught him as years went by to read and write, that he might not in his leisure hours brood upon his deformed shape, and nurture the dark thoughts of self-destruction that arose in his poor brain? Who made him look for love in him that rules the storm and bids the water be still? You, master; you did all these things, and yet, you ask if my love is so great."

"Good, Neganbo. I never, for an instant, doubted your devotion. You have proved it too often. Twice you saved my life—once from the tomahawk of an Indian again, from a watery grave in the lower lake."

"You did more for me, master, than poor Neganbo can ever pay."

"I did no more for thee, poor fellow, than any true man would have done."

"But look at me. See what a distorted mass of humanity I am. Look on this appaling face, these awful hands and feet, this crooked back and dwarf-form. No one but you would or did take mercy on me. But you saved me from the river into which I was cast, and the deformed dwarf is grateful."

"Come, come Neganbo," soothingly said the hunter, finishing his meal; "these thoughts you must drive from your mind. Don't brood upon your misfortunes; your form may be disfigured, but your heart—the main point of true worth in a human being—is sound and good. But I must tell you how near death I was."

"Near death!" almost shrieked the dwarf; and his wild eyes began to roll, "from whom, master?"

"The Indians," said the hunter.

"Curse them!" fiercely cried the dwarf; "but you were freed, you were not hurt?"

"No."

And the rescued captive related to the awe-stricken Neganbo the story of his capture, and mysterious release from death by his unknown female friend.

"Whoever that being was," exclaimed the dwarf, as the story was finished, "may heaven's blessings rest on her till eternity!"

"I echo that prayer with all my soul!" gravely said the hunter.

The storm without seemed to increase. Every now and then a great boom of thunder would tear over the cavern as if the very rocks and mountains above their heads were threatening to bury them in ruins.

"This is a fearful storm," exclaimed the hunter, arising, and going towards the cave-opening; "bring the torch, Neganbo, and let us sit at the open arch and view the storm—it is impossible to sleep."

They smothered the cave fire, and going through the dim arches they arrived at the opening.

The hunter sat within the shelter of the cave roof on a small rock, and Neganbo set the torch back from the

open arch in a corner, and both sat in the darkness, and looked out at the tempest.

The lake was a lake no longer, but a heaving, maddened, miniature ocean; the waves were high and rough, as is sometimes seen upon the open sea. The great cascade, now swollen by the rain to thrice its usual size and power, seemed a perfect water-demon, so loud, so awful and sublime was its noise and appearance at this hour and time.

A flash of lightning now illuminated the entire wild and impressive tableau, the lofty cliffs, the wild waters, the cascade fall, and the lone hut on the summit peak.

The two men sat in silence. At length, the hunter said, in a low voice:

"It's a fearful storm. Neganbo, are you asleep?"

"No, master," said the dwarf, starting, and looking up, "only thinking."

"Thinking?" echoed the hunter; "of what, Neganbo?"

"Of a wild night that resembled this in all its terror, years ago," answered the dwarf.

"You mean the night I picked you off the lake."

"Yes," said Neganbo. "It was a night somewhat like this—I remember it well. Storm and thunder, a dark opening in the forest near where the roaring river ran. I hear now, as I heard then, the voice of my father, imploring my heartless mother to have mercy on me. I hear again her passionate reply: 'He is deformed and crippled,' she said, 'and would be a bane and a curse to us. We must drop him in the stream.'

"I remember I cried aloud, as I was torn from my father's arms by my mother. I feel now as I felt then, the awful shock as I was raised and hurled into the running stream, and then I knew nothing until I felt your timely hand grasp me and raise me from the waters which would have been my grave but for you. It is these thoughts that fill my brain to-night, master."

"Well, well, Neganbo, bury them forever. Try to—— heavens! what a deafening peal!" as a loud roll of thun-

der burst over the lake, while streaks of lightning illuminated the scene.

"Horror, master! Look there—up at the peak, where stands the solitary hut. Look, look!"

They did look, and beheld a ball-like dart of fire burst from the heavens above.

It was a thunderbolt—that winged messenger of fire and ruin.

It shot through the storm, across the cascade, over the water, and struck the old roof of the hut on the peak. Even where the two watchers sat they could hear the awful, human shriek that came from the hut, there, as a couple of females rushed out of the doomed cabin and suddenly disappeared.

The flames of the hut were fierce and powerful.

"Great powers! there were human beings in that old rookery, and I never knew it; women, too; where have they gone? The thought is maddening. Negambo, light another torch, for our way lies in the shadow of the rocks. Lower the two canoes, place a torch in the stern of each, and we may find the two beings, if they are not already engulphed by some false step."

The roof of the burning hut now fell in with a crash, and the next instant a heap of burning rubbish toppled over the peak, and fell hissing and sputtering in the waters below.

The men reached the shore. Taking their torches, and tying fast their canoes to the shore of the lake, our hunter and the dwarf commenced to ascend the rocky staircase that led to the peak above them.

On this exciting tableau the curtain descends, to rise upon a new one.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DWARF'S ERRAND—ATTACKED—A RACE FOR LIFE—HOW NEGANBO DECEIVED THE REDSKINS—THE SIN OF THE SORCERESS.

It was the morning after the wild storm, and a gloomy, foggy morning it was. The ground was soft and yielding, the trees bowed down with the rain of the previous night, while the entire atmosphere was shadowed with fog, and sultry with the watery heat that prevailed everywhere.

Not a bird warbled, not a glad sound was heard. All seemed gloomy and in the blues, and without ceasing, a slow, drizzly rain or mist was falling, rendering everything uncomfortable and damp.

Around the well-laden breakfast-table of old Tom Plaster—the illustrious papa of Miss Polly Plaster, the beloved of Mr. Billy Blinker, Esq.—was gathered the above-mentioned, added to which was a quiet, Quaker-looking elderly lady, the pious aunt of Miss Polly.

Mr. Plaster was a tall, thin man, of perhaps fifty years of age, a hale, robust-looking old fellow, good on a scouting hunt or an Indian fight, but tremendou on old whiskey.

His daughter Polly was a beauty—at least, her father represented her as such—with coal-black eyes and hair, and a plump, rosy face that always wore a coquettish smile.

Ten minutes after the meal was over, Billy Blinker started from his seat, and pointing towards the forest path, said:

"Look thar, I swar it's Howard's dwarf, Neganbo, and coming here; what's in the wind, I wonder."

Off towards the forest path, through the gloom of the

morning, and taking the path that led to the settlement, came the goblin figure of Neganbo the Dwarf.

His pace was quick, as if the errand he was on was hurried. On he came through the misty rain, with his grotesque limp, carrying on his arm a basket made of prairie reeds of his own make.

Down the path came the dwarf, and now his knock was on the gate, and Blinker came out, went to the gate, unbarred it, and admitted the deformed.

"Welcome, Neganbo, old boy, welcome," heartily said Billy, giving the hand of the dwarf a sound shake.

"Thanks, master Billy, thanks," answered Neganbo; "but I am in great haste. Pardon my behaviour, but can I see Mr. Plaster? Is he at home?"

"Yes; come right on. Awful day, isn't it? Come in," said Blinker, arriving at the cabin door of old Tom Plaster, and pushing it open.

Warm was the welcome Neganbo received. Polly, before ten minutes had passed, had prepared a delicous repast for the dwarf, who delicately yet firmly denied it, saying:

"I am in a hurry to reach my master at the cave. I come for some brandy.

"Brandy," said old Tom Plaster, in consternation.

"Yes," said the dwarf; "during the storm of last night, the lonely hut upon the cascade peak was struck by a thunderbolt, and its inmates——"

"What—inmates? why, chaw me up, was the place occupied?" cried old Plaster, in wonder.

"It was," answered Neganbo; "a fact we were not aware of until last night, when, as the cabin was struck a couple of women ran from the doomed hut and disappeared. After diligent search amid steep and dangerous rocks, we found both females lying senseless, embedded in a hollow pit near the edge of the cascade Fall. We bore them to our cave, master and myself. They are still insensible, and master Howard bade me haste to you, and procure some liquor or spirits, with the hope that it may

revive the two woman, who looked when I left them, as if they slept in death."

The request was readily granted, and the dwarf received the flasks he had brought full of fine brandy and whiskey; his basket was also well stocked with a well-filled bundle of bread and some "delicate bits," as Polly said, for the poor women at the cave.

A few minutes afterwards, the form of the dwarf was seen climbing the steep hill that led to the thick wood above.

"Gloom, gloom, dense fog over everything; yet ere long it will pass away, but the never clearing gloom that lies upon poor master's mind, at the memory of his slaughtered wife and stolen child, will never pass away, until his daughter is found, if found she ever will be."

The forest border was now reached, and Neganbo entered a glade.

The stillness of the morning was broken.

Suddenly while in the act of crossing a small brook in the woods, he came to a halt.

"Indians," he said to himself; "curses on them, and I in such a hurry to reach the cave."

Through the forest a hundred yards from where the dwarf stood, came the forms of three savages. He, the dwarf, was not perceived by the Indians, as they were busy relating some incident to each other; so the dwarf cautiously crossed the brook, bobbed behind a tree, then passed to another.

A squirrel just then run along the branch or fallen trunk of the tree, where Neganbo was concealed. It attracted the notice of the savages, and they raised their cruel eyes to the tree, and beheld the goblin figure of the dwarf.

"Ugh—fire devil," cried one; "little devil, no let grow big, kill, ugh, kill."

"Stand back, ye infernal fiends of satan. Come no nearer. Ye rush upon your doom. Back, I say!"

He pointed the rifle at them, and they laughed.

"Must kill—little devil—much brave," yelled a second, preparing to rush upon the dwarf.

The report of a rifle, a fierce cry, and the largest of the Indians fell to the earth, shot by the dwarf.

"Now to regain the borders of the lake," said the deformed, as he rushed with superior speed, considering the basket he carried, and the lameness of his limb.

Once or twice a couple of bullets rushed past Neganbo. The dwarf seemed like "Legendary Casper," to bear a charmed life, as every messenger of death flew harmlessly by, and the fugitive sped on for the lake shore and life.

Within a few yards of the borders of the lake, Neganbo turned and fired once more at the reds. But the aim was uncertain and took no effect, only to make the pursuers redouble their speed.

At last the dwarf reaches the margin of the lake.

He hastily cuts the strings that hold the canoe, and puts for the centre of the stream.

The two Indians looking like baffled tigers shriek in disappointment and rage at the escape of their foe.

One, as a parting salute, raises his rifle and fires at the dwarf in the canoe.

The deformed Neganbo utters a cry, and falls to the bottom of the canoe.

The Indians utter a glad cry, and point toward the bark where the dwarf lies, wounded, perhaps dead.

At last one plunges into the lake, and starts for the dwarf's canoe.

The other stands upon the shore to watch his comrade's progress in dragging their foe on land.

The Indian in the water nears the canoe. At length he reaches it, and raising himself grasps it firmly, but the next moment gives vent to a surprised yell of terror.

The form of the dwarf arises, and clutches the throat of the Indian in a mortal grip.

The ruse of Neganbo succeeded.

The gleaming tomahawk is torn from the savage's belt

and upraised before his staring eyes. The throat of the redskin is grasped tighter.

The Indian utters a faint stifled moan, and the next instant the sharp-edged instrument, crashes through the savage's skull, and lays the brown face open at a single blow.

The bloody, ghastly head sinks in the lake, and with a dark frown from the deformed, he cries out.

"So perish all of your accursed race, from the broad land of the West.

Float on, ye bloody object of my punishment, that all who behold ye may witness the swift and fatal retribution of those who bar, or seek to stop the path of Neganbo, the Dwarf."

The oars of the canoe worked onward, up to the lake, through the fog and mist of the morning.

Half an hour after, the warriors, women and children, of the Indian village, were startled by piercing cries, from the margin of the pool, and there sat the old Indian medicine hag, rocking to and fro and shrieking in loud accents, as she looked at the dead and ghastly Indian that lay at her feet.

It was her son—whose hatred for the whites had been as fierce and deadly as his Indian mother was.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DWARF'S VICTIM—THE INCANTATION OF THE SORCERESS—MYSTIC VISIONS IN THE FRAME OF SKULLS—THE PROPHECY—RESOLVE AND RAGE OF THE INDIAN MOTHER—ON THE TRAIL.

A deep, hollow moan of lamentation came from the dusky throng of savages.

"No pity, brothers and sisters; no peace and

quietness until my White Wolf is avenged, until I bring ye back the proof of my success and I hold before your eyes the scalf and left ear of the assassin."

During the time of which we write, the fierce Shawnees considered the possession of a pale face's left ear as true and reliable a proof of victory, as they did the appearance of an reeking scalf, therefore the allusion made in relation to it by the Indian hag is explained.

"What means this bustle and confusion," sternly asked Dalton, joining the Indian at this moment.

"See, great chief, my son," replied the witch, pointing at the dead Indian. "Look at that fiendish wound, oh brave 'White Wolf,' your death shall be avenged in blood—in red, red blood; ha! ha!"

The renegade came closer to where the body lay, and as he caught sight of the half open face, he started.

"Fiends infernal, it's a white man's work," he loudly cried.

"Yes; a white face has done it," replied the old medicine; "as my eyes rested on his wound, a spirit whispered it to me."

"But look, great medicine, that peculiar blow, the face laid open by a tomahawk. I can name the hunchback of the lake as the destroyer of your brave son, 'tis thus he assassinates all of our brethren; 'tis thus he marks all that falls by his hand."

"May the malediction of the Indian mother pursue him—demon of deformity that he is."

"You wish to avenge 'White Wolf,' do you not?" said the renegade to the hag of the glen village.

"Avenge him—I'd hunt the traitor to the world's confines to do that act."

"But we have no clue to the hunchback's abode; Great Medicine, where would you search; how know where to begin the trail?"

A ghastly, bitter smile crossed the witch's ugly features as she replied:

"You forget the mystic frame of skulls, good chief."

"True, I did forget; it is a useful and faithful informer of all we would foresee."

"It is a frame within whose borders—composed of the skulls of the murdered red sons of the forest—the clear shadows of coming and past events are seen as plain as the noonday sun; the Great Spirit of the Indian race bequeathed unto my father, long moons ago, the mystic frame; and when he was called to the Great Spirit's hunting grounds, it became mine; its warnings we must heed—or woe, woe to us."

"We disobeyed it once, when we attacked the settlement a short time ago, despite its warning to remain here."

"And behold the result," cried the sorceress, to the remark made by Dalton; "you failed, were scouted off, and lost many a true warrior."

"Shall the body of 'White Wolf,' be conveyed to your wigwam?" asked the renegade.

"Yes, chief," replied the Indian mother, "to my wigwam bear ye the body of my brave son; mystic frame I'll use, and conjure up the pale fiend that robbed Ka-tis-ka of her warrior son; malediction! malediction!"

They bore it, amidst low moans, to the opening of the wigwam; then laid it on the green grass; all departed.

A large, spacious wigwam, lofty and wide; its sides were entirely covered with weird, fantastic devices of the Shawnee race. A large, smooth rock served as a table; and on it stood a round, high box, which contained a number of the most deadly reptiles and serpents that inhabited the poisonous swamps. The roof was covered with dried and drying roots and herbs, and a large chest stood in a remote part of the wigwam, containing a bountiful collection of the most potent and deadly poisons and antidotes.

And now we have a very particular article to describe—one which plays a very important part in this scene.

It was the mystic skull frame.

It stood suspended from the door of the wigwam by

two strong ropes of prairie-grass, and formed a square frame, some six feet in height and width.

It was composed of the human skulls of long-dead Indians—all strung and fastened together by a black cord, like a lock of hair—the ghastly skulls now white with age and rottenness.

All that foggy, dreary morning, all the weary, rainy afternoon that followed, the weird old Indian woman sat in her one position.

Afternoon died at last, and night came on—such a terrible night.

All was darkness in the wigwam of the Indian sorceress.

At length the woman arose from her posture, and going to the large chest took therefrom the small skull of a child, white and bleached.

Taking the grim object, she laid it on a small red rock that stood before the skull frame, then from a green poisonous flower, she pressed a dozen or so drops of a milk-like liquid into each one of the hollow eye-sockets, a few peculiar looking leaves and berries, and again a thin powder was added to the skull.

"And now to finish the charm," muttered the witch, as she with a sharp knife pierced her tough arm, from which was dropped into the eye-sockets, and on the grinning skeleton head a number of drops of the sorceress' blood.

As the last drop of blood fell, the entire hollow interior of the death head became illuminated.

Their flames of a pale green hue, shot up from the hollow eyes its light falling on the mystic frame, and making the skulls that composed it, more ghastly than before.

"And now while the lamp of the great spirit works its power, the Indian mother will look to her son."

The dead Indian she carried without the wigwam, and into the drizzly foggy night bearing a small torch, that gave light up the way, and buried it.

The grave was closed at last, and soon after Ka-tis-ka, entered her wigwam.

The queer flame still burned in the skeleton head.

Closing the wigwam entrance, the sorceress went towards the mystic flame and crossed the green flame thrice with her hands, muttering in a deep tomb-sounding voice:

"Spirits of night, foreseer of the unknown, the Indian mother Ka-tis-ka calls upon ye.

"Mandalika hears thee and knows thy wishes. Look steadfast on the frame of skulls, and to thy vision comes the fate of thy son, who, on the upper lake this morning, met his doom," said a hollow voice.

A low distant voice that seemed to issue from the illuminated head, spoke these words above.

"Ka-tis-ka thanks the powerful spirit of night, and awaits with anxious heart the coming vision."

As these words were spoken, the pale green light became of a dull, misty grey color, leaving the vast wigwam in total darkness, the light only falling on the frame of skulls.

The sorceress fell on her knees, clasped her hand, and looked intently on the misty space of the frame.

Slowly the thick mist in the frame cleared away, and dispelled, and as the last curl of vapor ascended, a thrilling vision was discovered, and revealed to the wild eyes of the Indian wizard.

It was the identical scene we witnessed on the upper lake the morning of that very day.

There in the canoe stood the dwarf, Neganbo, holding in one hand the uplifted tomahawk, and grasping with the other the throat of his Indian victim.

The vision vanished on the instant. All was darkness for a second or two, then the light burst forth from the skeleton head again, but this time of a different color.

The entire scene was bathed in the crimson hue of blood.

The positions of those on the lake were changed now.

The dwarf now held the Indian, whose face was laid open from ear to ear. Then the dwarf, with a scowl of hatred, cast the quivering body into the lake, and shot up towards the cave.

The mist began to obscure the vision, and the blood-red light to die away.

"No, no!" screamed the sorceress, stretching her claw hands towards the shadowy scene; "no, great spirit, depart not yet, until ye have revealed to me the abode of the accursed dwarf, the white-faced assassin of my brave son. Cast upon the mystic frame his home, that I may track the coward and avenge 'White-Wolf.'

The spectral, unearthly voice from the death's head again spoke.

"Sorceress and Medicine of the Shawnee tribe, seek to know no more."

"Spirit of night, depart not yet," in frenzy cried the witch; "put me on the dwarf's track, that I may hunt him down—ah. Furies the charm dies out, the spirit re-refuses my last wish."

"It does," again replied the voice, growing more distant; "go not upon the trail of thy son's assassin, or thy doom be close at hand. Danger and death, lurk and follow all thy race that seek to track the deformed friend of the hunter. Beware, the spirit of night warns thee go not upon the trail of the assassin dwarf."

The now pale crimson light died out.

The wigwam was dark as the grave.

The hag leaped to her feet, beat the air again and again with her hands in a paroxysm of rage and madness.

"Not follow the white-faced cur? the slayer of my son? So says the spirit of night, but I disobey for the first time thy warning, though. Thou may prophesy my downfall and death, though I perish in the act; yet I go upon your track. Dwarf! snake! oh that I could capture you, and burn ye at the faggot pile that I might gloat and laugh, ha, ha, upon your agony and pain. I thirst for his blood. I hunger for his heart. I disobey your

will, great spirit, and risk thy anger for I am mad, mad, and know nothing, feel nothing but hate and vengeance against the murderer of 'White-Wolf,' brave warrior of a powerful chief, thy maddened resolute Shawnee mother follows like death upon the track of your destroyer, to avenge thee, my sacrificed warrior son."

From the skeleton head came a loud, hollow laugh of derision.

With a shriek of pain she started back.

"The warrior's mother has provoked the great spirit. Disobey him and thy end on earth is near."

Again the awful voice from the skeleton head had spoken, this time in a threatening and angry tone.

That next day contrary to the prophecy, Ka-tis-ka left the Shawnee village to trail the dwarf Neganbo, and to pay the penalty by an awful death.

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CHAPTER X.

ZOE AND HAGER IN THE CAVE—THE LONELY HUNTER—THE SORCERESS AMONG THE ARCHES OF THE CAVERN—DANGER ABROAD.

SCENE.—Abode of the hunter in the cascade cavern.

One week had elapsed since the fearful night when the mountain hut had been destroyed by the thunderbolt, and the inmates saved by Howard, and the dwarf.

On a bright afternoon six days after their rescue, Zoe, the renegade's daughter, and Hager, her faithful old friend, were seated in the cave engaged in conversation.

They were alone, the dwarf and Paul Howard being absent on the pond some miles below, catching fish.

Both women looked extremely happy, and contented in their new home.

Zoe never did look more beautiful in her life before. A happy light was in her eye, and though her dress was

patched and shabby by exposure to the late storm, yet the quiet air of peace and new joy, made this object but a matter of small consideration.

"We are happier here than we were at the old cabin, are we not, Zoe?" asked old Hager.

"Happy at the old cabin, Hager dear? I was never happy there after I overheard that plot, that I frustrated. Oh! I was completely miserable, while I believed that wretched man was my father.

"I know you were, and that's why I told you, honey," said Hager.

"At night I could not sleep, for thinking of that sinful man, and when I did sleep, my dreams were of wild and murderous shapes. I would behold massacres, conflagrations and brutal murders, and amidst all the terrible horrors, Dick Dalton like a red-handed fiend, would stand and smile at his cowardly work. But now since I am not the child of Dalton, I sleep in peace, though you will not tell me whose daughter I am. When I ask you if my parents live, you do not know, but time will tell. Why do you keep my parentage a secret from me, Hager?"

"You must not ask me, Zoe, for the present I can not answer you; have patience, darling, only wait a little while, and you shall know all. When Hager reveals her secret, let this content you, that you are no kin to Dalton, the renegade."

"I won't trouble you any longer, good Hager, by asking you. I will be content until the times comes—but don't you remember you once told me that the renegade had a captive in his wigwam whom he unkindly treated, and who was a drudge of his Indian wife. Who is she?" asked Zoe of Hager.

The old woman started at this question and turned her head. Zoe did not observe her, so she replied:

"Some settler's child I think, stolen in infancy; its life is a living death, it must be."

"Does its parents live?" questioned Zoe.

"That's hard to tell; all I know is that it is beaten, kicked, spurned like a dog; that the father or mother did some unpardonable act towards the renegade, and in revenge he abducted it. This is all I know."

"Poor thing, what a fate," said Zoe.

"Don't mention the circumstance of the stolen child to Mr. Howard, Zoe. Years ago he lost a child by abduction, and were he to hear of this, he might imagine that it was his daughter, and so imperil his life in seeking to rescue her; besides his daughter, they say is dead."

"Fear not, Hager, I shall not mention it to him. Poor, careworn man. I always thought there was a deep sorrow on his mind, he is so sad and melancholly, and so lonely."

"Perhaps the cloud now upon his mind may be dispelled in time."

"What mean you, Hager."

"I mean perhaps he may gain some word of the fate of his child—even if he is convinced of its death, it will be a satisfaction to know it is safe."

The subject was dropped, and the women sat in silence.

The curtain of the cave-opening was tied up, and a balmy breeze came sighing through the cavern, from the lake, while through the grim rock arches, so high, thick and numerous, the clear sparkling cascade, whose tumbling waters seen through the front opening, looked like a crystal torrent of silver waters in the afternoon sun.

Both women gazed from where they sat at this imposing scene, through the arches of the cavern.

"Beautiful, is it not, dear Hager, so hidden, so free from savages," cried enraptured Zoe.

"Yes, darling, 'tis a pretty looking and secure spot."

"It has been Mr. Howard's abode these many years, he tells me—but it is almost time they returned, is it not? the sun begins to sink very low."

"They will be hear shortly, no doubt," replied good Hager, arising and stirring a large caldron like vessel that was boiling merrily over the log fire.

Zoe also arose, and began to lay the pine table with dainty completness, and prepare the supper.

Half an hour afterwards, a shrill whistle in imitation of the mountain bird fell upon the women's ears from the exterior of the cave.

The entrance of the outer cave opening was darkened, as a canoe appeared, and Paul Howard and the dwarf Neganbo stepped lightly upon the ledge of the cavern rock.

After they had stowed away the canoe in the hidden crevice, both men wended their way through the arches of the cave, each carrying a string of fresh, newly-caught fish.

"Back again," cheerfully cried Howard, as he ascended the rude, rocky steps, and entered the cosey, comfortable, furnished cave; "we have not been absent in vain, have we, Miss Zoe?"

"No, indeed," answered the girl; Now you are hungry I'm sure. Come, Hager, let's see if we can't prepare some of these nice fish; you are an excellent hand at cooking."

"Hush, honey, don't flatter me," good-naturedly replied the pleased old woman, as she prepared a pan, and, assisted by Neganbo, began to "slaughter" the fish.

Between Zoe, Hager and Neganbo, the supper was soon ready, and all done credit to old Hager's cooking.

Supper over, and all cleared up, twilight came on.

Zoe sat by the side of Hager, engaged in mending some home-spun garment.

Paul Howard sat near the dead fire, looking with a vacant stare at the charred logs.

The dwarf Neganbo lay in the shadow of an arch, not far from the front opening, looking at the cascade.

At last, Zoe arose from where she sat, and seating herself on a rude stool at the hunter's feet, looked tenderly up into his sad, wrinkled face, and affectionately asked:

"Why are you so silent and gloomy; you are not ill; your face is pale, but you always look thus."

The hunter started at the sound of her voice, with a wan smile, as he replied:

"When you have had misfortunes as I have had—when you have lost the beings you adored, and sought in vain to learn their fate—then, perhaps, you may learn why I am moody, and at times unfriendly, Miss Zoe."

"Never unfriendly, Mr. Howard."

"If at times I am so, you must pardon me; I am a rough man; and 'tis many months since these eyes beheld a woman; Neganbo and myself live quite insulated here, and if we are unsociable———

"That you or Neganbo never is unkind, Hager, and myself know—but it is not that I allude to—it is your melancholy brooding; why do you not try and be more contented?"

"Contented," cried Paul Howard, a look of agony on his face; "contented while the fate of my child remains an unsolved mystery; contented while my sacred oath, made by the side of my dying wife, to regain our child is unfulfilled. If I only was convinced that it was dead—that it was beyond the power of suffering, I should be content; but this lingering torture, this awful suspense, is killing me."

How much poor Zoe desired to inform the hunter of the stolen child, a captive in the Indian village. She looked at Hager, who clearly read her passing thoughts, but who signaled for Zoe not to divulge the intelligence.

Wondering at Hager's mysterious instructions, Zoe again spoke.

"Whom do you suspect as the robber of your child."

"Dalton, a renegade. Then the terror of the frontier, a man who sold his friends to revel in butchery and blood."

"Does he still live?" said Zoe after a few moment's silence.

"That's hard to say, Miss Zoe; some say he does, while others confirm that he fell in a skirmish with a Sioux Indian three years ago; which of these reports I am at a loss to believe."

Again Zoe was in the act of revealing the glen of ferns where Dalton entirely disguised as an Indian and holding the psition of chief, walked the world unpunished.

Again old Hager's fingers was raised to enforce silence.

"Don't let hope die yet within your bosom, Mr. Howard; Hager or myself will remain here, if you will let us, and try and make your troubles lighter and less heavy to bear. You may discover your lost child yet," Zoe said, firmer in her belief that the renegade's captive was the hunter's; remember the darkest hour is always before dawn."

"Yes, Mr. Howard," spoke old Hager from her corner, in a prophetic tone, "Zoe is right. There is bright sun behind the thickest cloud, and "after dark the light will come."

It was quite dark now, and Neganbo entering the cavern lit two torches, which gave a bright, though smoky light.

Some time afterwards, both women after bidding Howard and Neganbo good night, entered their small chamber, and retired to rest.

"Neganbo," spoke the hunter as the dwarf was preparing his master's couch, "this day I noticed as we ascended the rock facing the ruined mountain hut, a small box among the rubbish, apparently, uninjured by the fire. I asked Miss Zoe to-day, if she desired it, she replied that it contained a few articles of clothing, and desired us to procure it for her, if we passed near the hut. Now Neganbo, will you take the canoe to-morrow, and bring Miss Zoe the box?"

"Yes, master," said the dwarf.

The hunter, with a weary sigh, lay down near the dead fire, and went to sleep.

The dwarf had blown out one torch, and was about to extinguish the other, when a sound in the outer cave caused him to turn.

It was the sound of a woman's garments, brushing against the arches of the large cavern.

The dwarf went to the top of the rocky staircase, and holding aloft the blazing torch, peered into the darkness of the cave below.

The cave was so enveloped in darkness that nothing could be discerned.

"Strange," muttered Neganbo on the rock-stairs.

The bright silver rays of the rising moon, now came through the opening, falling upon the huge rocky pillars, and giving them the appearance of giant monsters.

It was the Indian sorceress, Wa-tis-ka, that Neganbo saw by the moonlight.

Carrying the torch, the dwarf went down to the ledge of rock, and looked up and down the moonlit waters, but saw nothing.

"What form was that?" queried the deformed, preparing to re-enter the inner cavern; "who has gained the secret to our hidden cave? Can it be that we were followed to-day—impossible—foolish thought.

The dwarf gained the foot of the rocky staircase, knocked the light from the torch, ascended the stairs and went to sleep laying at the entrance of the upper cave.

The light of the moon shone upon the deformed body and hideous features of the poor dwarf, while the cascade roared, and so the night passed on.

CHAPTER XII.

AMONG THE RUINS—THE DWARF AND THE SORCERESS—THE PROPHECY FULFILLED—OVER THE CATARACT.

The morning following the strange apparition of the sorceress in the gloomy arches of the cascade cave which appeared to the dwarf Neganbo, was a clear and mild one.

At daybreak the dwarf lowered his canoe into the lake, and leaping in, pulled across the waters to the opposite side.

The mission was to procure the box of clothing belonging to the two women.

After paddling across the lake, the canoe stopped at the bottom of the craggy steps.

Leaping on the narrow stretch of sandy shore, the deformed dragged his canoe out of the water, and concealed it in a small hollow.

The hunter still slept in the cave, as did also Zoe and Hager, Neganbo having taken great care when he departed on his errand not to awaken them.

On the nigh, projecting edge of the peak near where the cascade tumbled and roared, was the bleak and desolate ruins of the mountain hut, that fell a victim to the fatal thunderbolt.

A couple of charred and blackened logs, was all that remained of it now, while the ground for a few yards around, was strewn with cold black ashes and half-burned sticks.

"And now to find Miss Zoe's clothing box," said the dwarf aloud as he came upon the ruins. Approaching it, Neganbo cast his sharp, keen eyes searchingly about and at last the box he came in quest of met his gaze, lying near the trunk of a fallen tree. To gain the box, he was compelled to cross the ruins of the hut, near which a thicket of dense bushes grew.

He had crossed the debris of the hut, had reached the tree where the box lay, and was in the act of stooping to regain it, when the tall giant form of the Indian sorceress, sprang from out the shelter of the bushes, and with a cry of triumph, buried her long talon nails into the neck of the startled dwarf.

"White hunter's friend—red man's assassin, the Indian mother and destroyer of her son, meet at last, ha, ha," hissed Wa-tis-ka into the ears of Neganbo, who now recovered his surprise.

With a silent, powerful effort that took the wizard completely off her guard, the dwarf suddenly twisted himself free from the vice-tight grasp of his female foe,

and in an instant had hurled the fierce witch against one of the charred logs of the ruined hut.

"Infernal hag of satan, what mean ye? speak," cried the dwarf as he surveyed his Indian enemy.

"Assassin of my Indian son, I come to kill you, and avenge White-wolf."

"To whom do you allude," spoke the deformed.

"My brave warrior son," answered the hag, in bitter tones; "nine days ago while on the lake, you met my son, my brave and powerful Shawnee son. You took his life, all was revealed to me, his mother, in the frame of skulls, and despite the spirit's warning I have come to avenge my warrior son."

"I did kill your brave son," said Neganbo, sneeringly; "and I only regret that it was not ten of your sons instead of one. Out from my sight, thou unlucky hag, and go your way, else I may forget your sex.

With an aggravated yell the wizard drew a long Indian scalping knife from out her girdle, and with a panther's leap, sought to bury it in the heart of Neganbo.

But she was again defeated in her dark purpose.

With a smothered curse the dwarf caught her arms and grasped them tightly, while he cried:

"Will you go your way, I ask? or must I stain my hands in your blood? Will you depart?"

"No!" shrieked the Indian woman, stamping her bare feet in rage, and struggling to regain her liberty. I have been on your trail for days past, defying the anger of the spirit of night, and to allow you to escape, I will not. I shall kill you, and then reveal to the warriors of my tribe your master's lodge in the cascade rocks—they will come, massacre and scalp all."

"What?" loudly exclaimed the deformed; "the woman whom I judged last night to be a goblin from the other world, the silent figure my eyes fell on in the dark cabin was——"

"Me," yelled Wa-tis-ka, finishing the sentence; "I tracked ye to your secret abode and now know all."

With the wild cry of a desperate animal when danger and death threatens those it loves, the dwarf caught the satanic hag by the throat, and deaf to her threats and curses, dragged her across the ruins of the old hut in the immediate direction of the now sunlit cataract falls.

"To your doom, witch of a Shawnee; to your death sorceress," was the answer to the cries of the hag.

"Spirit of night," wailed Ka-tis-ka; "aid me before thy dread prophecy comes true; aid me, aid me!"

The dwarf and his victim near the swelling torrent cascade.

The bright morning sun has arisen, and tinges the water tops with its yellow light.

At last both stood on the awful summit of the cataract.

The dwarf wheels around, and the sorceress is held on the very verge of the precipice,

"Look," said Neganbo, pointing to the rushing waters below; "look, and behold your grave, a cursed fiend of a Shawnee. Do you know why I put ye to death? It is because the sacred abode of those I love better than life itself, has now become known to you, and no redskin aware of that home can live. In killing you, by casting your worthless carcass over yon waters, I save the lives of my master and the helpless women, cast upon our protection."

"The curse of Wa-tis-ka, the malediction of our entire race rest upon ye," screamed the sorceress.

"Down, blood-stained hag, to the doom you richly merit."

As Neganbo uttered these words, he let his grasp on the woman relax.

A shriek rent the morning air, as the victim toppled over the ledge, but in falling she clutched a thick branch of an overhanging bush, and in desperation kept her hold.

The dwarf knelt down, and taking the end of a thick, stout log, struck the old hag's fingers that grasped the bush.

Once, twice, thrice he struck, and then the sorceress relaxed her hold upon the twig.

Over the cliff to her doom and death, went the sorceress of the Shawnees.

She had disobeyed the spirit of night, and the prophecy was fulfilled.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CLOUD PASSES FROM KANTA'S MIND—"FOREST FLOWER" LOSES HER TEMPER, AND WISHES SHE HADN'T—THE ESCAPE TO THE WOODS.

FIVE months after.

It was the middle of winter now, and a severer one never visited the earth.

Within the closely-shut wigwam of the renegade chief of the Shawnees, sitting moodily before a warm fire, and robed in his Indian robes, was Richard Dalton, the disguised white man.

The renegade was alone.

The snow on the ground was crisped and mostly hardened; and away off in the woods, where the winds whistled amid the barren skeleton trees, crouched a frail, thin girl, whose face, blue with cold and starvation, gathered brushwood for her villainous tormentors, the renegade chief and his squaw.

One hour passed by.

The pale, thin drudge now raised timidly the thick canvas of the wigwam, and, as she stood there, she presented a sad, pitying spectacle.

Her dress consisted of a thin green gown, and a torn piece of dirty colored canvas covered her shoulders; her feet were completely bare, and blue with cold; while in her skeleton-like arms she carried a heavy bundle of forest brushwood.

She stood at the entrance a second or two, her dead-looking eyes wide and extended in awe and fear; yet there was a more sensible light in them than when last we saw her, and that half-idiotic expression seemed to have somewhat lessened.

The tyrant turned fiercely around:

"Come you, for an idiot, why do you stand holding that canvas open this bitter day. Come in, I say, or——" and a heavy log of wood was upraised.

"Yes, master, yes," meekly said the girl, doing as she was commanded, and depositing her wood on a stool in a corner, and then going to the warm flame and rubbing her almost-frozen hands over the welcome blaze, keeping her eyes upon the renegade all the while.

"Pile more wood on that fire, you shivering lump of humanity!"

Silently, timidly, the demand was obeyed.

Finally, the wretch, with a troubled sigh, sank to the earth, by the bright fire, and rested his chin on his hand, gazing dreamily into the blaze before him.

The girl crouched far back into the shadow of the corner, and, with a new expression in those once misty, dead eyes, regarded her master intently.

The renegade was deep in thought, thinking of his dead daughter, who was lost to him for ever—thinking of the ruins of the lonely mountain hut, where he supposed her scorched bones were buried.

He had nothing to live for now, he thought; only hate and revenge found a place in his granite heart.

During all this while, Kanta, with silent movements, as if drawn by a fascination she could not resist, was creeping, with clasped hands and tearful eyes, towards where Dalton sat, in thought.

Closer and nearer to her hater she came; her heart beat loud and heavy as she was within a few feet of Dalton.

"Master," she softly said, as, with an effort, she fell upon her knees, at the feet of the renegade.

Had a rattlesnake bitten him, his surprise could not have been more startling.

He merely sat spell-bound and speechless, looking down at the pleading, tearful eyes, and listening to the voice that said:

"Don't be angry, master, please don't. I want to tell you something; perhaps you may kill me for saying it, but I can't help it. I am not the girl I was a little while ago; I don't know why, but there has come over my once clouded brain a bright stream of light; and though you have treated me very cruel, and hate me so much, yet it seems as if, since the cloud went from my brain, that I love you very dearly. I can't tell why; do you know, master?"

She received no answer, only that cruel, demon expression.

"Until a few months ago," continued the poor girl, "I never had a clear head; all was blank and dead; but now, when my eyes rest on you, there comes to my awakened heart a strange feeling, as if you were in some way related to me—that——"

"Do I hear aright, or do I dream," at last shrieked the raging renegade, as he arose and shook his clenched fist over the kneeling girl's defenceless head; "infamous object of my lifelong hate, what the devil possesses you that you have spoken thus. Has your brain turned?"

"No, master," replied the girl in a firm voice; "my brain has not turned; the shadow, I feel, is leaving it, and a new light beams upon me, the light of clear reason."

"What prevents me from tearing out your infernal heart, slave?"

"Beat me to death; I care not; 'tis all I expect; but I love you, for all that."

"Love me, ha, ha!" and the renegade forced a cold laugh, or chuckle of disdain.

"I feel a strange love in my broken heart for you; its cause is a mystery to me, and I cannot account for it, only I feel that I love you as a daughter should love her fa

ther. There, I feel better now. I have made bold to speak to you as I never spoke before, and I expect to suffer for it."

"Suffer!" he hissed, fairly dancing with madness; "you shall be tortured for such presumption, thou pale ghost offspring of my most deadly enemy, your father. You are getting troublesome, I see, and your wings must be cut so close that the knife shall pierce your flesh. Do you understand, dog? Off to your corner, and from this time till sunset on the morrow you shall fast, and consider yourself lucky that I do not murder you. Off, I say, and take that to impress my command into your memory."

"The girl, with a sob, retreated into a corner, and was felled to the floor by a heavy stool, thrown with great force, by the brutal renegade.

Casting a malicious look of hate and anger at the prostrate girl, the white chief of the Shawnees passed through the wigwam opening, and disappeared.

* * * * * *

Poor Kanta was at last awoke from the pain of the blow by the entrance of the renegade's squaw, whose face was flushed and gait unsteady.

The squaw, shivering and staggering, sank down, with a grunt, near the fire, and, pulling from her bosom a small Indian wooden vessel, swallowed the contents of stolen whiskey.

After mumbling in a wandering sort of a way to herself, the squaw turned her head, looked closely into every corner of the wigwam with her wild, bloodshot eyes, and at last spied Kanta.

"Devil Kanta," said "Forest Flower," using her pet phrase; "you lazy; must get lick; bad devil."

With these words the squaw made a rush at the girl shaking above her head a savage-looking raw-hide, made of the strongest buffalo hide, and kept expressly for her chastisement.

With that black cruel lash, as far as her memory

would go back, Kanta had been daily, sometimes hourly tortured by it. Often again and again, had those five thongs of hide been lashed upon her defenseless face and back, as the long blood-red marks and brands could testify, and now as she beheld her hated tormentor approach her to renew the act, her eyes flashed as they never did before, her teeth were set together, her thin hands arose to ward off the woman.

"Don't come near me at your peril," were her words.

The Indian wife paused, astonished beyond description, as her white husband had been at the sudden transformation in the nature of their once humble, cringing slave and drudge.

"I repeat, 'Forest Flower,' don't come any nearer, for there is danger in me, woman, at this moment. Don't think I tremble as I used to do, when I saw the lash you now hold. No; I am determined to protect myself, if I die for it. Since I was a helpless babe, I have feared you; but I mean to turn the tables on you now, heartless fiend. So don't as you value your life, attempt to strike me with that weapon; stand off, I say."

The woman frenzied with desperation, caught up a good sized log and hurled it at the bold girl who thus had defied the anger and vengeance of the chief's squaw.

Kanta of course leaped aside to avert the blow, and the Indian woman taking advantage of the girl, who, for a moment was off her guard, caught her by her long hair, raised the whip aloft, and brought it down with a sharp cut on the shoulders of the poor captive.

"I'll make you suffer for that," cried Kanta, smarting with the pain.

Like some enraged tigress, the strange girl leaped upon the demon squaw and grappled with her.

It was a fearful struggle for the mastery.

Kanta was for a time almost overpowered by the squaw, almost double her size, but she was lithe and elastic, while her adversary was well-nigh stupid with rage and drink.

Catching her enemy after a severe struggle by the throat, the girl snatched the raw-hide from out the woman's hand, and raising it aloft, brought it down over her shoulders, over her face, and across her brown neck with force enough to do credit to her master, the renegade.

Another heavy blow, and the Indian wife fell to the floor in rage and pain.

Kanta flushed and heated after punishing her tormentor, went to the wigwam door and looked out.

"Thank fortune, no one is near," she said to herself, as she went to where the woman lay on the floor.

Kanta had done well her work, for the effects of her thrashing and the "fire-water," had made "Forest Flower" insensible.

Taking a small Indian blanket from a peg, the girl threw it around her head and body, and bending over the prostrate woman, cried in a passionate tone:

"At last, cruel woman, I have avenged my wrongs; this place will be too warm to hold me now, and I leave you; and rather than return, I'll kill myself. I will, I will. Oh! how you will storm when you regain your senses; but then, it will be too late—softly—softly," as she prepared to depart.

Again she looked up and down the cheerless glen, crossed a thick piece or timber, and reaching the margin of the lake, walked over its glittering frozen bosom, and in five minutes was lost to view amid the skeleton trees on the opposite side of the lake of ice.

———:o:———

CHAPTER XIV.

WINTER—THE LOST FOUND—THE TRAP IN THE ICE—HOW THE FUGITIVES MADE THEIR NIGHT JOURNEY THROUGH THE SNOW-STORM.

One week later a wild, snowing afternoon, Zoe, Hagar and Paul Howard were seated before a blazing fire in the

cascade cavern. There was a look on the hunter's face that had been a stranger to his face since that awful day, when his wife and friends had been murdered by the Indians in their valley home.

Zoe sat at the hunter's feet looking up into his joyful eyes, while Hager with a happy face sat knitting and saying nothing. And why, reader? Because she was too happy.

"Dear father," Zoe was saying; "kind Hager's words have come true. 'After dark the light has come.'"

"I have regained my lost child, my beautiful Kate. Once Zoe, and I am happy; all these long years of weary watching was nothing compared to this hour of heavenly reconciliation. My poor wife's request has been granted. My daily prayer has been heard; I have found my child, and I feel that at this moment the angel spirit of your dead mother looks down from the Heavens above, and smiles upon this meeting."

"Next to Heaven, father, we are indebted to Hager. What a service she has done us! What would have been my fate had it not been for her—good, kind Hager."

"Don't thank me, Miss Kate—you ain't Zoe any more, you know. Dick Dalton killed my husband, and I shall avenge him. Wait until he learns that he has been deceived; wait until he finds that the child whom he thought his own was his enemy's; wait, oh! wait, until that moment."

Kate, as we must now call her, and her father shuddered; they had heard all, and knew that the old woman had been awfully, terribly avenged upon the renegade.

What that revenge was—how fearfully it was felt—reader, you shall soon know.

Again the occupants of the cave relapsed into silence. At last the hunter said:

"In a week or so, dear Kate, we shall leave this cave and make our future home in the settlement of Banksville. It has been a safe, cosy home to me these long years, but then my old heart was dead and sad; but now

'tis no place for my child, or either of us. No! for my bosom thrills with joy, and I have cause to feel happy. We shall go where kind friends will be near us. The old commander of the place has often asked me to join the settlement, but companions I did not want, for my heart was sad, and Neganbo and I were contented where we were, but next week we shall depart for Banksville, and that shall be our future home."

Both women approved of the idea, and the day was fixed for their departure.

Suddenly a distant sound of hurrying footsteps came upon their ears.

"It is Neganbo," exclaimed Paul Howard, arising; "what can have happened that he runs thus."

"Ill news, perhaps, dear father," added Kate; "there is danger—Indians, perchance."

"Do not fear, Kate; it is Neganbo, you see."

It was Neganbo, breathless with running, and coated with snow.

"What is the matter, Neganbo—speak?" asked Howard, in alarm. He had loved ones to protect now.

In a few moments the dwarf spoke:

"We are no longer safe here!" he said, catching breath, and then adding:

"Our secret retreat has been discovered by some spying red fiend this morning. They are aware of our numbers, and five Shawnees have been chosen to attack us."

"In Heaven's name, when?" asked Kate, turning pale.

"This very night, the fiends."

"How were you informed, Neganbo?" said Howard.

"By a scout from Banksville, master, whom, as lucky chance would have it, I met three hours ago near 'Reptile Swamp.' He was on his way here to give you the news, when we met. He overheard the plans laid, and they will be carried out; we must work."

"We must leave the cave, Neganbo."

"Yes," answered the dwarf; "but not before we have punished the reds, master. I have a plan, and I am cer-

sain of its success. Miss Zoe—Kate, I mean—and you Mrs. Hager, don't at all alarm yourselves. We are all safe, take my word for it."

Negaubo's scheme was executed by the two men, and it was this:

The entire lake, as we said before, was a sheet of thick ice, and while Kate and Hager bound together all the small articles that could be conveniently carried, the dwarf and Howard, each, with a heavy, pointed log, made their way out of the cave, and leaped down upon the frozen lake.

Both went to work in earnest, and began cutting the ice directly at the foot of the rock.

Half an hour after, a square opening, some five feet long and four in width, was broken in the ice.

A thin piece of canvas was next procured, and laid over the trap.

At length the work was complete, and the men viewed their work with satisfaction.

"Come, Negaubo," said Howard, "let us re-enter the cave, for I am bitter cold, and so are you. A better plan could not have been hit upon. The falling snow, ere night comes on, will cover all traces of our trap, and the Indians will find themselves in the cold waters of the lake before they can realize their peril."

Both Howard and the dwarf re-entered the cavern.

The night, as it advanced, became more temptestuous.

Hour after hour went by, yet all undisturbed. At last all, warmly wrapped, concealed themselves near the outer opening of the cave, and beheld the wild and wintry scene, and their foes approach.

Through the thick falling snow—through the black gloom of the night—steal towards the hunter's cave, the dark figures of four savages.

They arrived at the border of the lake; stepped lightly on its hard, snow-clad surface, and came like shadows over the frozen stream towards their anticipated massacre and slaughter.

They are near the trap, and all crowd close together—step, step—until they stand at the very brink of the watery grave.

The entire four savages make a silent rush to ascend the small projecting rock of the cave.

The false step is taken; the snow-covered canvas, in an instant gives way, and down, yelling, in the cold waters, dash the doomed Indians into the black square trap in the ice.

A weird laugh of baleful triumph rings out on the air, and the dwarf leaps down on the frozen lake, drags with him an old cabin door, places it over the fatal ice pit, and all escape for the red men is shut off. They splash, and struggle, and perish in their imprisoned bed of ice.

That peril passed, a greater one was before them, that of reaching the settlement.

It was long past midnight when our party started for their destination, the settlement, which was three good miles distant, and the road through which they had to pass was one beset by foes and danger.

Through the raging storm of snow and wind the silent fugitives plod their way; through lonely, bleak and dense woods; across frozen streams, down dangerous passes and steeps.

Kate and Hager at times lost all hope of reaching their journey's end, the night was so dark, the snow falling heavier every moment, and the cold and wind piercing them like knives.

But a kind Providence watched over them; for, just as the day was breaking, the rude roof of the old blockhouse came in view to these cold and weary men and women.

CHAPTER XV.

SUMMER—THE SETTLER'S VICTORY—DALTON CAPTURED—HAGER REVEALS HER SECRET—REMORSE OF THE RENEGADE—DEATH IN THE BLOCKHOUSE—MURDER.

It was the morning of the tenth of June, and a clear bright morn it was.

With the birth of spring, the barbarities of the Indians increased, and they grew bolder and more desperate every day, until at last the pioneers decided to punish the savages as they deserved.

If Dick Dalton's name had been a terror of the border it was doubly so now.

The village of the Shawnees, in the leafy glen, had been discovered three days before.

Measures were at once taken to attack the place, capture the outlaw, and spare no red man.

So, on the summer's morning of the eventful tenth of June, a brave, resolute band of sturdy pioneers, commanded by old Banksville and a young hunter named Howarth Melvin, sallied forth.

Their number was eighty-seven, all young, strong men, of the border, and fully armed for any emergency.

One week before, Paul Howard, while riding a rather unmanageable horse, received a broken arm. Therefore, he was compelled, much against his will, to remain at home.

The pioneers had left the settlement at break of day.

It was near noon when they hid themselves near the outskirts of the village. Dalton was in his wigwam, while grouped around a cauldron of dark liquid, the entire Indian villagers, sat devouring their noonday meal.

From that last meal they were quickly aroused to meet brave men and death.

To describe that struggle I do not intend; enough to say that it was a fierce and desperate one, that the red men were overpowered and dispatched.

During the affray, the renegade Dalton, after a tough effort to free himself, was captured.

Not a savage, man or woman, lived to tell of their defeat that day.

Dalton knew that unless he could escape, his doom was fixed, and destiny sealed.

On entering the town, he was immediately hurried into the old fort, taken to the guard-room at the very top

of the building, where no chance of escape was possible, and securely locked therein.

He sank down on the floor. At last, wearied by his long march and tramp through the country, he fell asleep.

The hours passed on.

About eight o'clock when all was darkness, the footsteps of approaching feet were heard ascending the steep stairs leading to the prisoner's room.

The massive chair was dropped, the bars slid back, and the door was thrown open.

The commander, followed by a dozen settlers, entered the room, and reclosed the door.

"Spit in my eye," was the commander's welcome; "so we've caught you at last, you villain."

"I suppose you have, but you've been long doing it, haven't you," sneered Dalton.

"Come, now, my bird, don't be getting sassy, I won't stand it; no sir'e. I ain't got any extra time to spare on a cussed white Indian as ye are; so keep a mighty civil tongue in yer head."

"Why do you intrude upon me? Why am I not let alone?"

"Dick Dalton, have you any idea what we intend to do with ye?"

"Kill me," he said; "it is all I expect."

"It is all you deserve," solemnly spoke the commander. "Yes, Dalton, you are right; death is to be your doom; 'tis that what brought us here, to tell yer that to-morrow you are to die."

Dalton made no reply; the old man continued:

"Perhaps ye think that you are to be shot, as traitors usually are, but with a murderer and renegade like you are, by whose hand hundreds have perished, there is a more lingering and painful death."

The renegade's face grew a shade paler, something of his late dream had occurred to him.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "you speak in riddles,"

"It will be more plain, then. Dalton, do ye remember how Farleigh Philips was put to death? Ye shake yer head. I'll tell ye. A strong log was driven into the centre of a swamp whar alligators daily frequented. There he was bound to the log and left to die. Of starvation? No; he was torn to pieces by the monsters of the swamp, his quivering flesh torn from off his living body, while he was as yet conscious, yet helpless. The rope that bound him is thar yet, as is also the very log. I mean the green swamp of reptiles. His crimes were far less than yours, yet he met that death, and you are to meet the same to-morrow."

A piercing cry of terror, and the trembling wretch cast himself at the commander's feet.

"Mercy, mercy, from such a death; you are jesting; you can't mean it. Give me a pistol, rifle or poison, that I may perish by my own hand, but oh! that awful doom in the swamp, do not, do not consign me to it, it would be devilish, inhuman, murderous.

"Do you speak of humanity?" scornfully said the old man; "you poor wretch, your prayers won't move us in our resolution. We're going to rid the country and the world of ye."

"I see my death warrent in your eyes. God of mercy, you are in earnest."

As Dalton uttered these words, he fell back against the wall, covering his face with his hands.

"Go," he said; "leave me to myself; your captive wishes to be alone."

"We've not done yet, Dalton," cried the commander; "that's a surprise fur ye. Jenkins," (to one of the men,) "open the door and admit those that are on the outside."

The order was obeyed, the door was opened, and Kate, Hager, Howard and Neganbo, entered the presence of the startled renegade.

His first glance fell on Kate. With a wild, glad cry, he sprang to embrace her.

She recoiled with horror, and two pioneers held him back.

"Not dead," he shrieked, clapping his hands and seeking to free himself; "alive, Zoe my daughter, and Hager too, you will save me."

"Murderer," said Kate in a trembling voice, "do not call me your daughter; do not call upon me to save you. I am not your child. Not one drop of your sluggish traitor's blood flows through my veins, renegade man of blood."

"Zoe, my child, are you mad, that you fail to recognize your father?"

"No, Dick Dalton;" and the brave girl took her father's hand, and came forward; "I do recognize my father. Do you know this man? Look closely."

Dalton looked at the furrowed face of the hunter, Howard. A change, slight at first, came over his own face. He clasped his hand, and murmured:

"Paul Howard!"

"Paul Howard!" echoed the hunter; "the man whose wife was assassinated by your orders; whose child you stole seventeen years ago, during the 'Valley Slaughter,' and the father of this noble girl!"

"A lie, I say," loudly cried Dalton; "your daughter I captured when a babe. I may as well confess it now since I am to die. I took her to my tribe of Shawnees and she became my slave, until, a while ago, she ran away. You see I have been amply revenged on you, Howard, for gaining the woman I loved. That was your child; this is mine!"

"Poor, deluded wretch! what proof have you of this?"

"Hager, there," he replied in a voice of exultation, "she nursed her from the third day she was born; squaw, woman, I say, is this not true?"

"It is," answered Hager, quietly.

"You see, ha! ha! she is my child; you would rob me of her in revenge for my stealing yours."

Hager began to speak now:

"Dalton," she said, fixing her eyes upon him, and speaking slowly, "near the end of last February, one cold night, three of the settlement scouts, on their way home, picked up the stiff, dead body of a young girl, lying on the open prairie; they bore it here, and buried it the next day. Do you know who it was?"

"Who was it? Why, that runaway imp of Howard's, to be sure. Curse it!" he hissed.

"Unnatural wretch! do you know whom you curse; do you know whose daughter it was that was found dead in the snow last February?" bitterly exclaimed old Hager.

"Again, I repeat, it was the daughter of Howard, his own daughter, whom I abducted seventeen years ago, and I have been avenged."

"And so have I—terribly, fearfully," said Hager, with a mysterious smile.

"You—revenged for what, woman?" demanded Dalton, with a scowl.

"Listen, and you shall know. Dick Dalton, do you remember a stormy night in August, twenty-one years ago, the night my husband passed the Red Briar Wood, with three bags of silver on his person. I see you do. You are aware that the night was a stormy one, and very dark; yet I saw you and your savage comrades attack my poor husband. I was concealed behind a thicket. I saw my husband pass near where I lay concealed. I saw you, as a flash of lightning came from the Heavens, meet my poor Tom, strike him senseless with a heavy club while you signaled for your Indians to come and dispatch him. They obeyed you, and he was cut to pieces before my eyes—the eyes of his wife, who looked there, unable to move or speak, until you had departed, carrying your ill-gotten gains along with you. Dalton, from that hour I lived only to avenge my husband. Day and night I racked my brain to conceive some plan to avenge him you had murmured. At last, one night you came to my hut, and desired me to become nurse for your child, as

your second wife. 'Forest Flower' was addicted to fiery drink, and you feared it would not be safe in the Shawnee camp.

"You were not aware that these eyes had beheld you assassinate my husband. I readily consented, and the next night, instead of one babe, you brought two, both of the same age, apparently, and much alike. The one, you said, with the red cord around its neck was yours; the other, a child of a man you hated, and whom you intended to make the slave and drudge of your Indian wife and yourself. After you had gone, a revengeful idea flashed into my brain. I now saw a way to avenge my husband. I would not kill you, no! but I decided to do a deed that, when it was revealed to you, it would wring your hard heart. In a few words, I'll tell you how I took my revenge. I changed the children, reversed their clothing, and when you had called after the child you had stolen, you received your own babe, yet did not detect the imposition, while I nursed and protected the child of Paul Howard. That was my revenge, Dick Dalton."

A bluish tint overspread his face, while one hand pressed his forehead, and the other was upon his heart.

"Hager," he moaned, in a low, feeble voice, like that of a dying man, "what is this you mean?"

"I mean that the poor girl whom you used as a slave was your own child, your own flesh and blood."

The man leaped forward and fell upon his knees at Hager's feet:

"No, no!" he cried, as he shook like a leaf and wrung his hands together; "no, oh, no! Hager, good Hager, don't tell me that; say that you are joking; say anything at all, but—the assassin of my own child! No, no! that's horrible, too terrible."

"Richard Dalton," said the woman in a solemn voice, "all I have revealed is as true as Heaven."

Such grief those present never beheld from a man before.

"She came to me that cold day, quietly said the ren-

egade, as if speaking in meditation to himself, and said she loved me as a father, and I cast her off and struck her. Oh! how clearly I recollect it; how sad she looked at me, and she went off to the woods that cold night, and was found frozen to death afterwards on the prairie. Oh! that was awful, awful!"

His eyes were dry now, and he still was on his knees at Hager's feet.

He had remained thus some three minutes, when he leaped to his feet, like a flash, started back, while a red stream of blood trickled from his lips.

"And you, woman, you done it," he madly yelled, pointing at Hager; "you put my heart under your foot, and tramped upon it. You changed the children, did you say? A withering malediction upon you, and on you and you," designating Kate and Paul; "my bitterest curse on ye all."

At this moment all turned to depart.

Hager turned her back upon the prisoner, and walked after those departing.

In a second, Dalton rushed upon the old woman, and grasping her short, thin hair, jerked her suddenly backwards, and, before she could raise a cry for rescue, a sharp, keen-bladed dagger was twice buried in her bosom, driven by the hand of the renegade.

As Hager, with a piercing cry, fell to the floor, the entire pioneers re-entered, and saw, with horror, the poor woman weltering in her life-blood, and dying.

Kate rushed to her good old nurse, with a flood of tears, and raised her old head.

Five or six men rushed upon the grinning murderer.

"Don't hurt him now," Hager faintly said; "reserve him for the fate he meets to-morrow."

Kate still held her head on her knee, and looked down, tearfully, into Hager's face, crying:

"Hager, darling, you are dying!"

"Yes, lovey!" and the pale face was covered with the death dew; "and I am glad—oh, so glad. Kiss me! There, your wrongs are righted, and my own avenged."

These were her last words. Kate, still holding her head, again kissed her.

The old woman smiled, her lips strove to speak, in vain, in vain.

She lightly dropped her head deeper into Kate's lap, and—so died!

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CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST ONE—LAST MOMENTS OF DALTON—DOOM OF DALTON IN THE GREEN SWAMP OF REPTILES—THE DRAMA ENDS, AND THE CURTAIN FALLS.

THE next day dawned.

It was the day fixed for the execution of the renegade, Dalton.

At noon that day, the renegade was taken from the settlement.

Dalton was dull, moody, and sullen, his head bowed down, and his limbs trembled, as every step brought him nearer and nearer the dread place where he was to die.

Not a word was spoken on either side during the journey.

Passing through a green glen they constructed a raft, and paddled to the opposite shore of a river that was on their route.

Away off in the distance arose a dense clump of trees.

At last the clump of trees is reached.

One hunter went before and pushed the entangled bushes aside, so that the others might pass through with their trembling victim.

All enter, and stand in a dismal, poisonous place

It is the green swamp of reptiles.

A round circle of thick yellow-green trees, all seemingly of the same height, while in the centre was a wide pool of dark, stagnant, green water.

In the very heart of this green swamp was a flat, moss-

grown trunk of a thick tree some six feet in height.

All traitors and renegades that fell into the power of the pioneers of Banksville, met their fate on that moss-grown tree trunk, in the swamp.

It was called Reptile Swamp and it deserved its ghastly name.

The eyes of Dalton took in all the horrors of that swamp, at a single glance.

"Mercy, if you are men, mercy, mercy!" was his only cry.

His appeals were unnoticed; the pioneers spoke not a word, but proceeded on with their preparations for death.

A plank was procured and thrown across from where the man stood, to the rock in the centre of the swamp, making a firm foot-hold for them to reach the rock and tree trunk.

Four men crossed, leading Dalton, who prayed and cursed, and sought to regain his freedom.

After a few minutes they succeeded in reaching the execution rock.

Terror and fear prevent the wretch from uttering a cry or word. His tongue is paralyzed.

Now they bind the victim to the strong moss-grown trunk, firm and secure, while his feet touch the narrow rock, and all hope of mercy dies from his heart.

The pioneers turn and cross the plank to where their companions stand on the shore.

"Mercy, for the love of Heaven," is the imploring cry; but he received no answer.

The plank was drawn away, and the men all disappeared.

His morning dream—the vision in the Block-house was realized at last.

"Don't leave me," he hysterically shrieked, as the last pioneer departed; "don't leave! Come back, in Heaven's name, don't leave me here to perish, to die by the monsters of swarming lake. They will not heed my cries,

they leave me alone in this awful swamp of death. Curse ye all, for fiends and devils—oh! horror, horror." With a snake-like twist; "Must I be bound here alone to die like a dog."

"Like a dog you have lived—like a dog so shall you perish.

The speaker of these words pushed the branches and weeds aside, and stood upon the bank. It was the dwarf, Neganbo.

"Deformed devil," cried the renegade, in consternation at this apparition; "slave of that accursed Paul Howard, why came you here?"

"To gloat over your pain and downfall; to behold you, notorious murderer and unnatural traitor to your color and race. What a merited fate you meet."

"Begone from my sight! Oh, that I were free!"

"But you are not free!" grinned Neganbo; "but are bound, that you may not interrupt the reptiles, while they are eating your life away, and swarming around you."

"Torture me no more, incarnate devil, deformed monster!"

"I came to comfort you in your final hour," mockingly cried the sarcastic dwarf; "think of your murderous deeds; think of your good life, of the poor old woman who fell dead by your crimson hand last night; of the child, your daughter—your own natural daughter—whom you killed with cruelty, and drove to starvation and death; think of these, and die happy!"

The dwarf stooped down and picked up a small, sharp-edged stone, and raised it aloft; then he hurled it with force at the helpless wretch.

It struck him on his bound hand, making a deep wound from which the blood flowed freely.

"Coward!" he exclaimed, with pain, "why did you do that?"

"I'll tell you, Dick Dalton. Look at your hand; it is bleeding freely, and the blood drops upon the rock. The smell of blood attracts the monsters that inhabit thi slimy pool. In the course of an hour these waters, n so quiet, will be filled with a howling multitude of gry reptiles. In two hours not a particle of your r less body will be left. Farewell, Dalton; your fe over."

A grin, a laugh, and Neganbo, the dwarf, left.

But, merciful powers, what paddling sound is that that falls upon his startled ears.

He shortly discovers. A huge, alligator-like monster, with shining back and open mouth is making rapid strides towards him, sniffing the air.

Two hours after.

We look for the last time upon the log where the renegade was bound.

He has disappeared; the tree-trunk holds nothing but a couple of pieces of torn rags, and some human flesh clings to the trunk, which, with the rock, is besmeared with blood.

The green water around the centre rock has changed its color to a crimson, a blood-red hue.

The swamp reptiles had become the executioners of the renegade.

Thus he met his doom, as his dream predicted—food for monsters in the Green Swamp Pool.

"Down to the dust, and, as thou rot'st away,
Even worms shall perish on thy poisonous clay.

—BYRON.

CONCLUSION.

OUR romance draws to a close.

Long life and true happiness blessed the future life of our heroine, Kate, and her father; and not many months after the events of our last chapter, wedlock joined together for life Kate Howard to the promising young hunter, Howarth Melvin.

Neganbo, like a faithful servant that he was, never regretted the day Paul recovered his daughter.

Sammy Swipes—we must not forget him—was the happy husband of Miss Sally Megg, now Mrs. Swipes, the first Mrs. S. having kindly "kicked the bucket" one night, and freed Sammy for ever.

The backwood settlement, from the day of Dalton's death, became flourishing. It became the dread and terror of the frontier Indians, and was by them avoided.

Our tale is done, and we drop the curtain on this our backwood drama.

"I hear the tramp of pioneers of nations yet to be,
The first low wash of waves which soon shall roll a human sea."

FRONTIER BALLAD.

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